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# LAND OF ELEPHANTS.

Big-Game Hunting in Kenya,  
Tanganyika and Uganda.

*by*

COUNT ZSIGMOND SZÉCHENYI

PUTNAM  
COVENT GARDEN LONDON

ELEFÁNTORSZÁG

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LAND OF ELEPHANTS

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*Translated from the Hungarian by*

RALPH MURRAY

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## CHAPTER I

### THE COAST OF CIVILISATION

*Nairobi. November, 1932.*

A DEAL has changed since I was last here three years ago. Things have been moving. Three years ago there were exactly two hotels, one worse than the other, and one solitary, desolate-looking, little bank.

Since then three brand-new, four-storied hotels have shot up from among the rows of unaspiring bungalows—four lift-band-and-wireless-equipped monsters—and two mighty modern bank buildings, complete with marble halls and money into the bargain.

And plenty of it. For here in East Africa, however improbable it sounds nowadays, people still have money.

True, there is groaning and gnashing of teeth even here by now. Liquidations, even bankruptcies proper are no longer the unknown quantities they were three years ago. And even here may now and again be heard sighs of regret for those eternal "good old days," and here too the axeing of labour is beginning.

But for all that, this is still another world. A better one. I make so bold as to state that it is a relatively good one. And those sighs going up on all sides are, so to speak, for the most part

## *Land of Elephants*

crocodile sighs—at present. For the present people here complain more for form's sake than for anything else. There is so much misery and trouble all over the world, think they to themselves, that it would be sheer tactlessness on our part to say we're still all right. Everybody who is anybody in Europe and America has gone bankrupt, or is going bankrupt, or will go bankrupt: going bankrupt is almost on a level with being "well brought up." People might say we're uncivilised savages: none of us even goes bankrupt. Even if we do live in Africa we know how to behave.

That is the impression which the complaints of hereabouts make on me. For where cultivated ground is still untaxed, where the mother-country, England, was this year for the first time responsible for suggesting the mere idea of income-tax, where the suggestion set up such a terrific indignation and met with such opposition that it was routed even before it developed into anything more than a rumour, where in the capital city there is, on an average, one car for every two-and-a-half inhabitants, and every shop assistant, girl typist and hospital nurse goes about her business in her own car, where you might ransack the place and not find any unemployed, where new buildings are shooting up like mushrooms, and where good mechanic chauffeurs are never paid under £8 10s. a week, there, as I think you will agree, at any rate in comparison with our degraded notions, there cannot be so very much wrong as yet.

And even if people here do bewail their lot there is no absolute reason to be sorry for them.

## *The Coast of Civilisation*

At present. But, unhappily, even their lean times are not far off. They are well on the way towards them. Decked in the sleek plumes of "culture," civilisation is advancing swiftly to the conquest, rolling on resistlessly from South Africa and Europe alike, closing in on East Africa, the kingdom of the elephants and lions and rhinos, and of millions of blissfully ignorant savages, the last stronghold of the Biblical Paradise, that "Darkest Africa" the days of which are now surely numbered.

To mention one thing: the Air Mail has been running between Europe and South Africa for a year now. London to the Cape—nine days.

Every week the big, gleaming, silver bird comes here to Nairobi, discharges the home mail and its three or four air-sick passengers, spends a night down there below the town, and then spreads its wings again and heads for the Cape of Good Hope. On these occasions half the town goes out to the aerodrome, are out there with an hour to spare, picnicking on the field, betting on who will be the first to see the "Ndeke ya Ulaya"—the "Bird from Europe."

Sometimes they wait in vain; the machine is held up somewhere and does not arrive before sunset. Then the whole public trots bewilderedly off home, and the bets are "off."

For the silver bird only flies by day, and at night rests like a migrating swallow. Athens is one of its resting-places, and there it picks up the Hungarian mail. I get it on the eighth day. Three years ago I was glad if I got a mail which had taken five weeks. By then all the letters were

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long out of date, and no longer true. Certainly not to be taken seriously. Then Nairobi really was still far from Budapest. Securely, restfully far.

Since then it has come a good deal nearer. For the eight-day-old unpleasant bit of news is still fresh enough to spoil one's humour; whereas before that, when it used to take five weeks, it could never do much harm, having had most of its venom dried up in transit.

But I was going to talk of my fears for the wilderness. Of what will happen here if things go on as they are? What will become of the hitherto mysterious "Dark Continent"?

As far as the mystery goes, it is already doomed. Soon the inviolate jungles and savannas will be degraded to haunts of trippers. A flood of tourists, week-end elephant-hunters, honeymoon couples and retired officials will be overrunning the country, and every week a collection will have to be made of greasy bits of newspaper. Kilimanjaro turned into a Hampstead Heath.

The Nairobi aerodrome, which was originally confiscated from the Athi plains' uncounted thousands of antelopes, has recently been surrounded with barbed wire, so that the antelopes and giraffes and zebras and ostriches shall not get in the way of landing aeroplanes. Only a week ago a machine had to circle buzzing round the aerodrome for about half an hour to clear the animals off it. And now the poor things are shut out by barbed wire. If their exclusion goes on at this pace, one of these days they will be clean out of Africa.

## *The Coast of Civilisation*

It is the same story as that of the vast, still legendary herds of game of South Africa, scarcely twenty-five years ago. South of the Zambesi lions only roar in Zoological Gardens, just as they do in London or Budapest.

But here, at any rate for the present, the lion still roars—thanks to the mosquitoes, the malaria, and, above all, to the excellent severity of the English game laws. Here he still roars in his own historic kingdom, and still as full-throated as when he roared out his hate at the white man who first dared to disturb his land a matter of fifty years ago.

But that he should now get a crick in the neck roaring at aeroplanes is somehow not right. You cannot demand that much of him.

The much-talked-of magic of Africa has been condemned to death. Whoever would still find it alive must hurry.



## CHAPTER II

### ELEPHANT HUNTING IS NOT ALL ROSES

*Kitui Forest. November, 1932.*

"ELEPHANT-HUNTER." It sounds fine there in the yielding arm-chair of civilisation, beside the crackling fire and the hot cups of tea, and under cover of a distance of four or five thousand miles. I can almost hear those sighs at home: "Ah! Old So-and-so (me, for instance), has a good time of it, going off again and leaving us here in the mess and muddle of all our worries and troubles, not caring a hoot about anybody else. Off he goes into the jungle, forgetting all about us and having but one care in the world; how much the tusks of the elephant he's after may weigh. Lucky blighter. That's the life."

Well, as a matter of fact, it is. We live the life of the elephant-hunter. That, I will not deny it, is most desirable and attractive to me, but it is not perhaps so fearfully enviable, perhaps not even that *ne plus ultra* which the experts at home imagine. On the contrary: not only *perhaps* not, but quite definitely not. I would go as far as to say that it is quite unrecognisably different.

For the elephant-hunter's life, his daily lot is: useless exhaustion, privation, regrets, ever-repeated failure and ever-reiterated strain on his endurance, his nerves and, above all, his patience.

## *Elephant Hunting is not all Roses*

His days are work-days, robot-days, with every now and again a Sunday, but very rarely. Yesterday was such, to-morrow will not be any different; for three weeks all has been quiet on the elephant front. It is a common saying hereabouts that no hunter is entitled to a big bull elephant till he has done two hundred solid miles on foot. As far as I am concerned, I qualified a long time ago.

But before talking about to-day's happenings, here is a little sketch of the position.

A quarter-acre clearing in a vast thorn forest. In the clearing a dark-brown, evil-smelling, knee-deep bog: our drinking-water, cooking-water, washing-water, as occasion arises. On the edge of the bog, a large fig tree; under it, my tent. Farther off, under another fig tree, my men's quarters: for tent, the shade of the tree above them, and for beds, the earth below them.

There are about twenty of them.

Two "Kirongozi." The wandering guides of the district—poachers in their spare time. Insignia: bow, quiver, spear, loin-cloth.

One "gunbearer." The individual responsible for the rifles, ammunition and photographic apparatus. Insignia: the ruins of a pair of canvas trousers, one tennis shoe (there were two when we started, but the other has dissolved since), a woollen beret with a tassel.

The "cook." Insignia: one eye, trousers, bunch of keys on a belt—as he is also the treasurer responsible for the provisions in the locked chests.

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The "butler." Insignia: yellow-brown shoes with big toes sticking out of both of them, shorts, a rainbow-hued pullover, a straw boater minus its brim and a little film-star moustache.

The rest are porters for my belongings; unaspiring savages without even distinguishing marks.

For the rest, they are all as black as the others, and the less they wear the honester they are, and vice versa. He of the Pullover, therefore, is the biggest ruffian of the lot.

Now: past five o'clock and not a sign of the butler-valet, though he ought to call me at five o'clock prompt. The good nigger reckons time by guess-work, not by the possession of a wrist-watch. Luckily, or rather unluckily, I have already been awake for some time to-day, as the rain is pouring down and my tent is already soaked.

A fumbling hunt for my electric torch. It ought to be under my pillow, but has fallen down in the night. So I go groping for it, and find it in a pool of mud under my bed. It won't light. I dredge up the matches, but the box is so damp that after breaking the heads off ten of them there is still no sign of a light. And then how dank and damp are one's shirt and trousers and stockings, with yesterday's rain not dried from them. A pleasure to get into them. Refreshing. In my boots some migrating ants have bivouacked for the night. They take bloody vengeance on me for disturbing them so early.

But such things are mere bagatelles. These are mere aperitif contributions to getting up, little morning reminders in case one should by any

## *Elephant Hunting is not all Roses*

chance make a mistake, and, I suppose, set off for the day in a really good humour.

Meanwhile He of the Pullover materialises. As a matter of fact, at such times he discards his insignia, not liking to expose them to the rain and preferring to get it straight on to his skin. He brings breakfast: a plate of rain-swollen porridge, and tea. While I am consuming this, the more essential members of the hunt assemble: the Kirongozi, the gunbearer and the water-carrier. All shivering, their lower jaws fairly rattling. The good nigger is always cold at dawn, but in such a wretched, soaking dawn he is as smitten with ague.

We set off into the forest. We are off to search for fresh spoor of the old, solitary, bull elephant, to pursue and just possibly to come up with him.

Yes, just like that. Except that we have already been doing it for three weeks with no result. He is hereabouts for all that, or he comes every now and again; for on several occasions we have come across his days old spoor; but he disappears again and wanders off to other pastures.

The rain has stopped. At such times it is child's-play to follow the spoor—if there is any. Those eighteen-inch feet drive holes the size of buckets in the soaked, yielding soil; a blind man could make no mistake about it. We proceed along a network of varied elephant tracks wriggling through the forest. The foliage is bent with the weight of rain, and so matted together that we can only cut our way through the thick wicker-work with the "panga," the broad-bladed bill-hook of the natives. In half no time we are looking like drowned rats.

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There will be plenty of opportunity to dry; nor need we wait long. By nine o'clock the sun is blazing so that we would take to the soaked thickets with pleasure if only there were any just there. Every now and again we come to a swamp and plunge knee-deep into the nauseously exhalant bog, or sometimes go in up to the middle in the morass that hides an old elephant track. But we don't greatly care; it is refreshingly cool to our lower halves.

Plenty worse to come.

The sun climbs up the sky. It grows and grows in merciless strength, pours down on us a hard rain of fiery darts, beats with glowing hammers on my head, dulling, dizzying, maddening my throbbing brain.

The Sun in full rage. The same benignant, health-giving, welcomed Sun, for which we wait impatiently at home; that refreshing, encouraging, fuel-saving, plant-forcing, cold-routing Sun! Who has done it wrong that now I must protect myself against it and flee before its face? What heals at home here threatens my life.

At noon, with our bodies throwing not a finger's breadth of shade, and with the Sun hurling his fiery bolts perpendicularly upon us, we stop and tumble stupidly under the shade of some thicket for a short noonday rest. After a tin of sardines, the bubbling oil of which nearly scorches my fingers, and a pannikin of tepid water, my mind, which had in the last three hours completely given up work, begins to stir once more.

There is trouble with the chocolate again.

## *Elephant Hunting is not all Roses*

Chocolate is my one little luxury. A little slab of chocolate properly done up in silver paper. But when the sun's wrath has been at it, it undergoes strange metamorphoses. Sometimes it has been squashed to a rhomboid, sometimes to a trapezoid, sometimes a polygon which no geometry could define. And in some incomprehensible fashion, the silver paper on such occasions gets innermost, and the chocolate on the outside. Every day I can await my midday meal with the pleasure of an almost uncontrollable curiosity as to what new guise my chocolate will adopt this time.

But to-day I was in for a nasty shock; for the heat had been too much for it, and it had run clean out of the haversack. All it had left behind in remembrance was the silver paper.

To heave myself out of the short after-dinner doze, is like waking from a drugged slumber. What exactly am I after? Oh, of course. Elephant tracks. Come on, then.

Once again I surrender my carefully cooled head to the unbridled sun, and my ragged clothes and bleeding skin to the thorns for further treatment. But of elephant tracks—fresh and big, such as I search for—there is not the slightest sign.

Three hours later I turn back so as to reach camp before darkness comes on, for the natives are as helpless by night as they are brilliant guides by day. Their guide and Kirongozi is the Sun.

Now, on the way back, the flame of the celestial Kirongozi is at last on the decrease. He has exhausted most of his ammunition, put forth his strength, knows he is defeated, and in impotent

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wrath thereat flushes redder and redder. And the more the blood rushes to his head, the more innocuous he becomes. After five o'clock he is so tamed that one can look him straight in the face. But he still goes on trying, getting more and more apoplectic till about six, when he suddenly bursts—and his blood spurts out over the low western sky.

The tropical night is no tactful lingerer. It shuts down suddenly, before dusk can get a look in, sweeping clean in a matter of minutes the sun's blood-stained couch, curtaining, darkening the world, while it lights, not one by one, but with one mighty main switch, its host of starry lamps. It is in a hurry for fear it should lose one single moment of its twelve-hour reign.

I reach home just, so to speak, at closing time. Dead tired, hungry, dirty, ragged. Not that it matters now, for before me is the whole gamut of pleasure.

In front of the tent, in the light of the lamp, my canvas bath is waiting to embrace me. The water in it is a brown and stinking soup—but cool, brown soup. And moreover it is dark in it, the lamp's light not reaching so far, and there is such a thing as illusion. At such times one conjures up every bit of it.

Then a proper hot supper. The first course is, perhaps, not up to much—being the daily dose of quinine. But after that come all sorts of things. True that it is accompanied by an abundance of mosquitoes, moths and winged ants. More than one really desires at dinner-time. So many that the soup heaves with them, and the glass

## *Elephant Hunting is not all Roses*

rings with their flatterings. Rings softly like some little crystal bell. One could attribute to oneself a special virtue in fishing out the smothering suicides one by one. One could break all records for life-saving. The boatman who lies in wait for his prey under the Chain Bridge in Budapest could have a perfect orgy here. But it being a question of rescuing my supper besides the bugs and beetles, I must needs cover my plate with another plate; then, with extreme caution, slip a fork and spoon between the two, extract a morsel of food, and hastily snap the two plates together again, quick as a mouse-trap. Like hooking pearls out of a half-open shell.

\* \* \*

After supper, surgery hours. Every evening five or six patients squat behind my tent in their open-air waiting-room. This, however, I can scarcely count among the pleasures—for pulling out thorns from horny nigger feet, washing and binding up filthy, mattery wounds and scorpion bites, administering quinine and castor oil—my two universal medicines—does not exactly contribute to the enjoyment of the evening.

Then comes the usual evening "sauri" (the evening conference). The whole council of elders comes to my tent: two Kirongozi, the gunbearer and an interpreter. This last individual is necessary because the Kirongozi only understand the Wakamba tongue, and I only understand Swahili—as much as I understand anything. I, on this occasion, lie on my bed, and the council squats all round me. The Council of War on to-morrow's



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operations proceeds at great length and with terrific solemnity. Everybody explains in great detail his own opinion, and proves the rightness of it with examples. A vote settles the differences, and when at last we have succeeded in deciding exactly how I am going to shoot the big elephant to-morrow, the conference breaks up. "Sauri ne kwisa, kwaheri!" the departing elders say. ("The sitting is ended, farewell.")

And finally, a little tailoring. Not much. Only the absolutely, inescapably necessary. The tattered legs of my trousers already reach no farther than my calves, and soon will have turned into shorts. The shirt is pretty decrepit by now, too; stuff for patches has always had to be cut away from the bottom, shortening it progressively till now it will hardly reach down to the trousers. I never had any great love for tailoring. Nor am I very good at it. My only consolation is an Arab proverb: "Thy beauty lies not in thy dress."

And last of all the "mpisi" (cook) appears with his large alarm clock which I must set for the time when he is to get up next day, and which, at night-time, in the case of every proper safari repose under the "mpisi's" head.

All very nice. But there were no elephant tracks to-day either. And how much longer is that going on?

\* \* \*

That is the daily life of the elephant-hunter. There are some exceptional days, when you find tracks, follow them, but do not succeed in overtaking the elephant before night. And then, with-

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out tent and without food, you can spend the night on the track, open to the attacks of mosquitoes and all the vagaries of the weather.

I hope that after all this my reader may feel a proper pity for me. I think I already see tears of compassion in his eyes.

Enough of moaning; down with this half-glass of whisky and swamp water, and huddle under the mosquito net. Inside is quite a different world from outside the net. All the ardour evaporated in the course of the day wells up again. With a good book one is at peace with the world; even with elephants. And meanwhile, hope, as it has every night for three weeks, springs up again.

To-morrow, perhaps. . . .

## CHAPTER III

### WITCH DOCTOR

*Kitui Forest. December, 1932.*

FOR weeks I have been wearing myself out, stretching my legs and my patience all in vain; I can't find elephant.

My native guides attribute this lack of success to the machinations of some evil spirit.

"There will be no change until you send for the nearest 'Makanga' (witch doctor). Only he can drive out the spirit from us, and only he can make us potent."

They've been living on that excuse for days.

I am not superstitious. At least, I like to think I am not. I take every opportunity of saying so. But that only succeeds in strengthening within me the suspicion that I may be. Every hunter is. And in Africa . . .

However, I laughed at the thought of consulting the witch doctor; I have no love of theatricals, I don't need hocus-pocus, what I want is elephant, we've got no time for such distractions, and so on and so forth. If one is kept tramping this torrid, brain-addling thorn wilderness without result, one gets extremely bad-tempered. The tropics always attack one's liver.

But when my companion began to insist that he, for all that, was going to try it, if only for the sake

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of the fun of it, and even without my knowing sent for the Makanga, I found myself waiting with interest, I might even say with impatience, to see what would happen. Though meanwhile I cursed my friend thoroughly and recommended him to take a gipsy fortune-teller with him on his next hunting trip.

Moreover, in token of my contempt I struck camp, and without waiting for the arrival of the witch doctor set off ostentatiously towards a district we had hitherto not explored. I took leave of my partner, telling him to let me know if his friend the doctor tied an elephant up to a tree for him.

On the following evening a runner arrived at my tent with a note telling me that my companion had shot a big bull elephant and I was to go back as fast as I could and he would tell me more when I got there.

I shook my head. That's luck, I said, not the Makanga. That Makanga had a mighty piece of luck to arrive at the same time as the elephant. The whole thing's mere chance.

But for all that the business worried me.

And the next day, to my shame, I set off again for the camp I had left. They were just bringing in the great tusks. My mouth watered.

My companion received me with the following fairy-tale:

"You had hardly gone off when the witch doctor arrived. Two villains carried his magical contraptions for him. After an hour and a half of more and more extraordinary jiggery-pokery, he began to

## *Land of Elephants*

prophesy that on the next day when I set out to hunt I should find on the right of my path the skeleton of a giraffe. Then, soon after that, a black animal would appear on my left; this black animal, which would not move out of my way, I was to kill. Later the tracks of a herd of elephants would cross my way, but although they would be fresh tracks, I was to pay no attention to them, but go straight on towards the east, and at nightfall I should shoot a big bull elephant. That's what the witch doctor said—and, believe it or not—that's exactly how it happened!"

"You trying to be funny . . ."

But in the end I had to believe him. Besides my companion swearing on his word of honour, there were about thirty blacks also bearing witness to the story.

The black animal which would not move out of his way, was a black mamba, the most poisonous snake in Africa, and my friend, in accordance with his orders, shot it through the head. And there was not much case for the skeleton of the giraffe lying there by chance; giraffe skeletons do not lie about all over the place; I have not seen a single one this year. And elephants we had been hunting for three weeks without result. And now, behold, they were bringing in the tusks.

But for all that I am not in the least superstitious. Nobody must suppose that I am. How should I be? I am only interested; I should like to know whether magic could work on me; I mean, whether I could have just such luck.

That evening, merely in order to be able to

## *Witch Doctor*

laugh at the witch doctor's science, I too submitted to treatment.

The Makanga made us all stand in a row, me and my followers, and after a short meditation he began to dance round us, yelling violently. Every now and again he checked in front of one or other of us and blew violently in our faces. I don't know about anybody else, but personally I don't like having somebody blow violently in my face. But for all that I stuck it; one will do a good deal for the sake of a big elephant. I merely blinked. Then the Makanga created a quite special magic all round us and cast a devil out of us. Cast him shrieking out of us. Finally he took my rifles in hand. He stroked them one by one, then blew down the barrels. Blew the devil out of them. What he blew into them had to be cleaned out with a pull-through.

Then came the prophecy. We had to gather round in a circle, the doctor squatting in the middle, with his two ministrants on either side of him. He spread out some small animal skins in front of him, skins of civet-cats and ground squirrels. Then from the depths of a mighty jar they produced several handfuls of dried beans of various colours. Black and yellow and wine-coloured beans, and among them one snow-white bean. For a long time he sorted and mixed them, till on each of the skins a heap of beans of a different colour was collected, and the white bean lay on the open palm of one of the witch doctor's assistants.

Then the doctor produced his bow, fixed an empty gourd between the bow and the bow-string

## *Land of Elephants*

as an amplifier, and on this improvised, one-stringed harp began to twang. To it he set up a soft, reedy singing, of which not one of us could understand a single squeak. He was singing in his own witch doctor's language, singing a special little song to each little pile of beans.

When he had finished that he tipped all the beans, white one and all, back into the jar, shook them well up and then handed them over to the circle of his audience. One after the other we had to shake them, and hand the magic gourd on—shuffling the cards, so to speak.

After the shuffling came yet another little song to the accompaniment of the harp. Then the witch doctor picked up the gourd and tipped out its contents all over the skins in front of him. On how many, and what coloured beans fell on each skin, but above all on how the white bean fell, depended the future.

The old magician almost immediately set to communicating the message of the beans, which was as follows:

“To-morrow morning you will set off (so much I knew without being told it by a witch doctor) and in the evening you will come back again to the camp (that didn't surprise me either). The next day, don't go out hunting, not even if you get news of elephants being in the neighbourhood. The day after that you can set off. You will meet a one-eyed man who will ask you for salt. Give him some. On the evening of that day you will find fresh elephant tracks, you will hear elephant's trumpeting too, but the big bull elephant you will

## *Witch Doctor*

not kill till the day after that, or even till the third day."

That's the main thing, said I to myself, the rest doesn't interest me. I will willingly sacrifice another day of delay, I don't even care if I get my elephant on the fifth day, as long as I get it.

With that the ceremony ended. Evening was coming on. Good prophecy can only be done successfully in the dark—unfortunately, because I could not photograph it.

\* \* \*

And on the third day, at noon, as had been said, I shot an eighty pounder.

True that I did not meet a one-eyed man who asked me for salt, nor did I hear the trumpeting of elephants promised me on the first day. But what do I care for such little blemishes? The best of witch doctors make a slip of the tongue now and again. The elephant came true, and that, not a half-blind nigger, was what I was after.

I am not superstitious, but if I should happen to come wandering along this way again, I should for all that consult His Excellency the witch doctor before I set to work. For the sake of a really respectable pair of tusks I will let myself be blown in the face as often as you like.



## CHAPTER IV

### BONGO

*The Bamboo Forest. January, 1933.*

I AM in the heart of tropical Africa, and somewhere near my tent runs the red line of the Equator—and I have never been so cold even out after wild boar in January at home.

It is night. A leaden rain is beating down, and a howling tempest is trying to uproot my tent. A milk-coloured mist is wheeling and planing on the wings of the storm, and round me the bamboo forest is creaking and rattling like the storm-hammered timbers of some ancient ship. I have had a tin bucket filled with glowing embers put in my tent with the object of warming the place, but it smokes so fearfully that ever and anon, having no desire to suffocate, I have to let in a supply of air. When I unbutton the tent-flap, the storm whirls in the smoke of the bonfire heaped up in front of it. Most unpleasant weather.

This wet and mournful camp of mine is up on the side of the 10,000-feet high Kinangop, to the south of Mount Kenya. Here it has been getting wetter and wetter for a week. And for all its wetness, in vain.

I have taken on a rather tough job. I want to shoot a Bongo. That is not easy. On the contrary, to be frank, it is devilish difficult.

## *Bongo*

For the bongo is Africa's rarest antelope. He is the giant antelope of the virgin forests, the hermit of impenetrable jungles, the unrealised ambition of countless hunters, the white blackbird of African trophy-collectors.

For the rest, the poor thing is harmless enough. Hunting it implies no sort of danger. It does not promise the excitement of shooting elephant, or lion, or buffalo; as far as I know no bongo has ever mauled anybody. And yet how many African hunters would, with the greatest of pleasure, exchange fifteen lion skins for one bongo head! For lions are shot in quantities. Lion-hunters here are commonplace. But the bongo-hunter, or rather someone who has really shot a bongo, is as rare as snow in June.

Shooting a bongo is for the most part a matter of luck. I know somebody who not long ago came up here, and on the evening of the very first day, within calling distance of his tent, shot a bongo, and on the third day was showing off its head in the bar in Nairobi. After that—he says—people dare to say bongo shooting is difficult.

That sort of thing does happen, but I know some people, and not a few, who have sought the bongo for six weeks on end without respite, have tracked it from dawn to sunset, have sat up for it by night, without ever having seen even the tip of an ear.

I shan't stick it for six weeks, that is sure. I am fed up to the back teeth with this hopeless work. Up to the teeth in more senses than one, for my throat is swollen so much from the soakings and

## *Land of Elephants*

freezings, that my enthusiasm in respect of the bongo is rapidly evaporating.

If it weren't that the weather were behaving as though possessed, if it weren't that every single possession of mine is wet through and through, if it weren't that my black servants were falling ill one after another, I could still forgive the bongo. For the country is beautiful, healthy, and the air is bracing. There are no unpleasant insects, neither mosquitoes, tsetse flies nor scorpions. One is not plagued with thirst, with perpetual sweating, with the taking of quinine. It is a wonderful place. I am fed up to the teeth with it.

Now, as I write, I am lying fully dressed, coat and all, on my bed, and cannot get to sleep because of the cold and because of the grinding of the wind-swept bamboo trunks; so instead I will take a pan of hot water from the pail bubbling on the fire, touch it up with some whisky, and get on with my diary.

A few words concerning this bamboo forest which is the bongo's lair. Dark green stems as thick as telegraph poles and as high as a two-storied house and as close together as a sheaf of wheat compose it. One can only move along the elephant paths—there are plenty of elephants hereabouts—for in among the bamboos a snail would move quicker than a man. The undergrowth is of stinging-nettles as high as a man and fierier than our nettles at home—so fiery that they will sting through two pairs of trousers one inside the other. High up, the bamboo trunks bear pale green, feathery leaves, a thick, inter-

## *Bongo*

weaving roof of foliage darkening the whole forest below. Even in daytime it is dusk in the bamboo forest.

The thirty to forty-foot bamboo trunks are full of crystal-clear water, each one of them a green painted water-pipe; if we get thirsty we bang a hatchet into some trunk or other, the pipe bursts, and out bubbles the finest of drinking-water. Oh, if only down in the stifling heat of the Kitui elephant forest there were a few such water-pipe trees. Here, in this cold, we rather naturally do not broach them over frequently.

It seems that in the bamboo forest there is never quiet. Even the tiniest breeze sets the bamboo rods creaking and groaning, and if the wind only ruffles their heads the whole forest grinds and complains, as though heavily-loaded carts with oilless axles were being dragged bumpily through it.

The air—as I said—is excellent. Fresh, invigorating, cool, only in consequence of the great height, rather thin, so that one breathes rather gaspingly, and quickly gets out of breath. Among the bamboos it is even worse, for the terrific undergrowth consumes a great part of the oxygen. Movement is not easy, either. One is always either climbing up hill or down. The whole region is mountain and valley and precipice.

This is the home of the bongo. Here one may shoot him if one can. I have become quite humble. I do not dare even dream of shooting a bongo, and should be content if only for one moment I could glimpse that legendary animal; I can't do even that.

## *Land of Elephants*

If only now and again it would come out of these despairing bamboos, out of that accursed wilderness of stinging-nettles. For here and there are to be found little clearings, swampy, fern-covered stretches of turf. But where it might conceivably be seen, there the bongo never ventures, for I have never once found tracks of it.

I usually rest in the clearings. One takes deep breaths of relief at coming out of the gloom and oppression of the bamboos. Magnificent ferns, higher than a man, and bushes covered with flowers like multi-coloured cornflowers cover the clearings. And here and there, a tortured, tempest-twisted tree ekes out an existence among the rank mass of weeds. Little yellow flowers crawl up it, and long pale green mosses hang from its branches like so many wind-whipped Santa Claus beards. As though the trees were hung full of rags of flax and dry sea-weed. But all this obviously does not interest the bongo; he prefers to stay inside among the bamboos.

I collected a few guides from among the Wando-robo natives, who are settled on the lower slopes of the mountain. These natives know every trick of bongo-hunting, and without their help no white man would ever shoot a bongo. They are remarkably clever trackers, expert hunters, tough, hard men who stand the vagaries of this weather to an astonishing extent. Their dress consists of nothing more than a few airy scraps of hide, and for that reason they are completely unaffected by the cold rain which has been slating down for days and days on end. They are not like the porters I have

## *Bongo*

brought from Nairobi, my cook and my personal boy, who, in spite of all the warm clothing I have given them, have fallen ill one after the other, are confined to their tents with a deathly chill, and are by now completely useless.

The Wandorobos have been hunting the bongo from time immemorial and with dogs at that. At dawn they search the banks of the mountain torrents which plunge down the gorges of the bamboo forest; for there the bongo goes down to drink at night, and there they may find fresh tracks to follow with their uncanny skill through the fearful nettle thickets of the forest. For hours on end, sometimes the whole day long, the weary tracking goes on, with often as the only guiding marks here and there a broken leaf, a bamboo stem hardly visibly scratched, or a nettle bent back. When at last they hear the crash of the animal leaping up on their approach, they release their dogs, which very occasionally succeed in overtaking and holding the quarry. With the dogs holding it at bay, the Wandorobos finish it off with their arrows.

I too put all my trust in these Wandorobo dogs; these, said I, *must* find and hold a bongo for me.

I did them too much honour. So far I could have got along quite nicely without any Wandorobo dogs at all. Six of the famous beasts are making a nuisance of themselves in my camp here. They catch all sorts of things, except bongo. They catch my breakfast whilst it is being prepared, my boots drying by the fire, my coat; and they

## *Land of Elephants*

display an extraordinary preference for sleeping on my bed.

They may be good dogs, but they are nothing to look at. They are not like any breed of dogs at all. They are not—as to their shame I must confess—even like each other. Each is a breed to itself. Their only common characteristic is their bark. They are a pack of mongrel, squint-eyed, unfriendly gipsy curs. “Full-blooded bongo hounds.” But their masters think a tremendous lot of them.

In the last ten days our bongo hounds have had two opportunities of showing that they are not unworthy of their name. On neither occasion did they make anything of the opportunity. Twice we succeeded in tracking a bongo so near that we could distinctly hear the crash and rattle as it bounded away. The Wandorobos immediately loosed their hounds from the grass-string leashes, and set to urging them on with peculiar and comic war-cries. The pack hurled itself with an in-harmonious yelping after the bongo, and for a few moments it seemed as if the hunt was really on, but then suddenly they quieted, tired of the chase, and back they came, smiling amiably like someone who has done a good job of work, and waited, wagging their tails, to be rewarded.

The yelling of this handsome sextet had, of course, frightened not only the bongo they had put up, but any other bongo there might have been within a radius of five or six miles. But the Wandorobos showed not the slightest sign of being put out: “That bongo was swifter than our dogs,”

## *Bongo*

they remarked with irrefutable logic, and went on praising their useless curs.

At night the pack sleeps round the ever-blazing camp-fire of bamboo logs. Bamboo thrown on the fire, being full of water, presently heats up and bursts with a report like a gun and scalds everything in the neighbourhood. At each such report the pack scuttles, yelping, and then settles back again. By now they are scalded and singed all over from the spurts of hot water and the leaping sparks, but they don't seem to care. Fire-proof, the beasts.

I do not understand the language of my Wandorobos, but there is one of them who during the War was a soldier, and is the proud possessor of a few words of English. All negotiations are carried out with his help. This warrior linguist is a great character, and a great producer of mirth. To-day he prepared a "Dava" (medicine) for my sore throat, out of paraffin, rifle-oil and ash. I am to rub this on my throat. He was full of its praises.

"This dava good to much. You take, bad cold he go finish."

Nearly always he greets me, whether it is morning, noon or night, instead of with the Swahili "Yambo," with the English "Bye-bye," and, giggling, makes little fluttering gestures with his hands, as he has seen the English women do in Nairobi.

Except for the bongo and a few bush buck (the little forest antelope), only elephants inhabit the bamboo wilderness. There are plenty of elephants



## *Land of Elephants*

round here, but all the big tuskers have been shot long ago, before the time of the game-laws. Nowadays a decent pair of tusks is found so rarely amongst these beasts that nobody hunts them. So they have lost all respect, and come incessantly trampling round the camp at night. Twice they have had me leaping out from under my blankets with their trumpeting and rattling of the bamboos round my tent. That is why I have had a big crackling bonfire blazing all night.

I have met them by day as well. On the very first afternoon, as I was peering about for bongo tracks in a swampy clearing, the bamboos suddenly rattled and brought forth an elephant. I was down-wind, so I squatted down and watched. The elephant, a young twenty to twenty-five pounder\* was shambling about not twenty yards away flapping his ears, snapping off twigs, rumbling his tummy, and generally ingratiating himself with me for a good quarter of an hour. He even allowed me to photograph him.

In that same clearing I surprised a whole herd yesterday—twenty-four of them. I wanted to photograph them as well, but they spotted me and dashed for the bamboos. The sight and sound of that dash could only be justly dealt with by a super sound film! A bamboo stem goes down in front of an elephant as though it were a match-stick. There was a crackling and banging like a battery of machine-guns. One would think the whole forest had been laid waste, but after the elephants have gone there it stands as thick as

\* i.e. Each tusk weighs twenty to twenty-five pounds.

## *Bongo*

ever. Only inside it is rather more of a mess than usual.

The storm is getting worse and worse. It is bringing down bamboo trunks left and right, and to-morrow we shall have a fine job climbing about over them. According to the Wandorobos, the crash of the breaking trunks scares away the bongo, and so they are moving off down to the sheltered sides of the mountain; but I, at the moment, can't go after them, having only a few porters, and they sick. . . .

\* \* \*

I was sitting once at the aforementioned bar counter in Nairobi. An old and famous hunter was having a drink with me, one who knows the bamboo forest well, and has shot bongo there.

"I will tell you one thing, young man," he said. "Whoever has once shot his bongo up there, never wants to go back again." He was a notorious drawer of the long-bow, though there I believe him. He couldn't have characterised the place better.

\* \* \*

Four days later.

It is no good. The rain and the mist go on. The rifle-oil is no good; my throat is swollen right up. The cook is sick as well, and there is no more cooking. I have had enough. Somebody else can go after bongo.

Break camp.

## CHAPTER V

### SICK

*On the Banks of the Northern Guaso-Nyiro  
River. January, 1933.*

NOR feeling quite up to the mark. No sooner do I go a few paces from the camp than I am dead tired, and have to turn back again. A touch of fever, can't eat a thing; the devil knows what's the matter with me.

Perhaps that has something to do with a cross-grained old rhinoceros nearly getting the better of me. I didn't mean him any harm. I was only trying to photograph him—without his permission, I admit.

When I noticed him he was idling about in a clearing. I cautiously moved nearer up-wind, and hiding behind a providential bush, set to work. I set up my camera, gave my rifle to the boy behind me, then undisturbedly photographed him, first from twenty yards, then from fifteen. He all the time came browsing unsuspectingly nearer, but when I let off the third exposure—from twelve yards by then—he heard the click and without the slightest warning came straight for me.

I grabbed my rifle from the boy, and jumped aside at the same time, but my foot caught in a root and I went flat on my face, rifle and all. The

## *Sick*

rhino could not pull up in his charge, sent my camera flying into the air, strode clean over me, or rather my legs, and shot straight into the jungle. And that was the last of him. My blacks had gone straight up a tree like a flash and now peered down at me from their height, and I sat on the ground and stared up at them. For the first time we could collect our wits enough to be really frightened. Till then we had had no time to be.

Apart from the fright there was no harm done, not even to the camera, which had fallen on something soft.

For all that I had lost my desire for further photography, and moreover was feeling wretched and so turned towards home.

My nerves were still in a bit of a jangle—for it was scarcely ten minutes since the rhino's charge—when there came a fresh excitement: one of my men looked down into the bed of the stream and jumped back shouting "Chui!"\*

In a moment I was beside him, but could see nothing. I ran ahead along the stream to a clearer part of the bank, and then I saw the leopard slinking along amongst the bushes of the river-side, all unsuspecting.

I gave him a bullet but hit only his foreleg below the shoulder. He whirled round, saw me, and came straight at me right up the steep bank. Back I jumped behind a bush, and as I raised my rifle, there was the leopard's head five yards from me. He couldn't see me for the bush, and was turning his snarling head left and right, holding up his

\* "Leopard!"

## *Land of Elephants*

broken, bleeding foreleg from the ground the while. More of him I could not see. . . .

Through a gap in the branches of my bush I shot him in the chest: over he went, backwards, writhing down again to the bed of the stream. I jumped to the edge of the bank, saw the leopard pull himself together again below, and begin slinking away with a smothered growl along the river; of the two bullets I sent after him, one got him behind the ear, and he turned three somersaults, and was dead.

By that time I was quite close to the camp and my shots had been heard there. When I got back I went straight to bed, exhausted.

\* \* \*

Evening: Feeling worse and worse, and obviously shall have to give up. According to the symptoms it's dysentery. My worthy cook has spent all day in efforts to extract from the troubled waters of the Guaso-Nyiro the two little fish with which he has presented me, as a surprise, for supper. They've got more bones than an old-fashioned pair of stays. But I can't get any food down now, so it doesn't matter.

About one hundred and eighty miles from here, at the foot of Mount Kenya, there is a small settlement called Meru. There I can find, if I can catch him, the nearest white doctor. There is only an improvised native hospital, with an Indian nurse as "house surgeon," but occasionally the white inspecting doctor is to be found there. If I am not any better by tomorrow—and there's not much hope of it—I will pack up and set off

## *Sick*

for Meru. If the doctor is there, he will, at any rate, have someone on whom to show off what he can do. But I think of the one hundred and eighty more or less roadless miles of lorry ride to Meru with a good deal of misgiving. Even for a healthy man it's no pleasure jaunt.

\* \* \*

Next evening: Here I am in Meru, in a wooden hut like a bathing-machine. The hospital's private ward. Luckily I have caught the white doctor here. He examined me, diagnosed—what I had no doubt of—that I had got dysentery, pushed a timely injection into me, sent me some milk for my supper, and ordered me to sleep.

That's easy enough to order, but difficult to carry out. Every four or five minutes I get fearful gripes, and my fever is worse. I will draw a veil over to-day's journey. It was not a pleasant one. Though on the way I had to take an oath amongst other things; but I don't want to explain all that, I am not in a mood for diary writing.

\* \* \*

Next day: It's not worth telling much about last night either. Never shut my eyes for a moment. For the most part I was on the move. This morning I am feeling a bit easier.

I should like to go on to Nairobi, where there is a good hospital, where one is well cared for, and actually cured. Only Nairobi is a matter of two hundred and thirty miles from here, and the road there is very bad so the doctor won't let me; "won't take the responsibility," etc.

But this afternoon he comes in to tell me after

## *Land of Elephants*

all that he has sent off a runner to the nearest telegraph station (fifty miles) and that from there—if the line has been repaired, for the last storm broke it—he will have a telegram sent off to Nairobi for an aeroplane. That is how he means me to be transported. At Nairobi there is always a machine standing ready to go to the help of any stranded *safari*. A very good arrangement. If only the thing would come now.

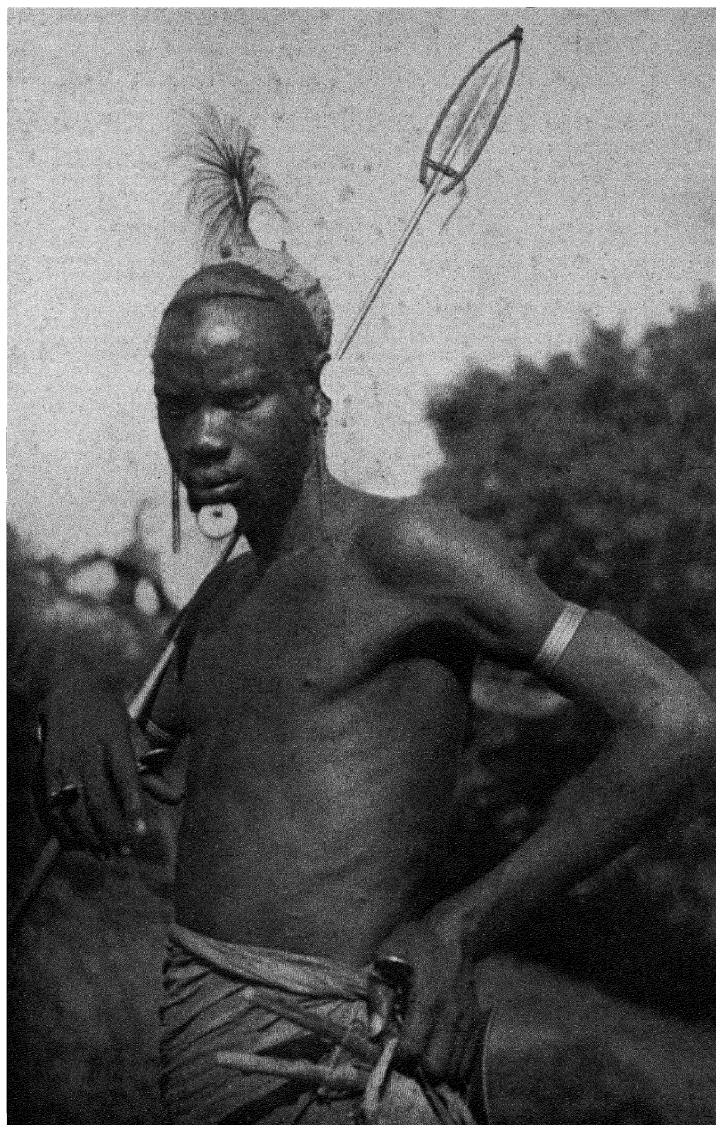
My only desire is for a clean bed and an intelligent doctor. And a hot bath. But that's three desires. I know this doctor is doing his best, but he hasn't got the necessary medicines.

Now I will go back and tell you how I was made to take an oath in the middle of my journey yesterday.

The thing dates from November of last year when I was after elephant in the Kitui region. One can take out two elephant licences; but I had only taken one. Everybody does that. You only take out the second one later when you have shot your first elephant. You do that because if you don't succeed in shooting anything the Government does not give you your money back.

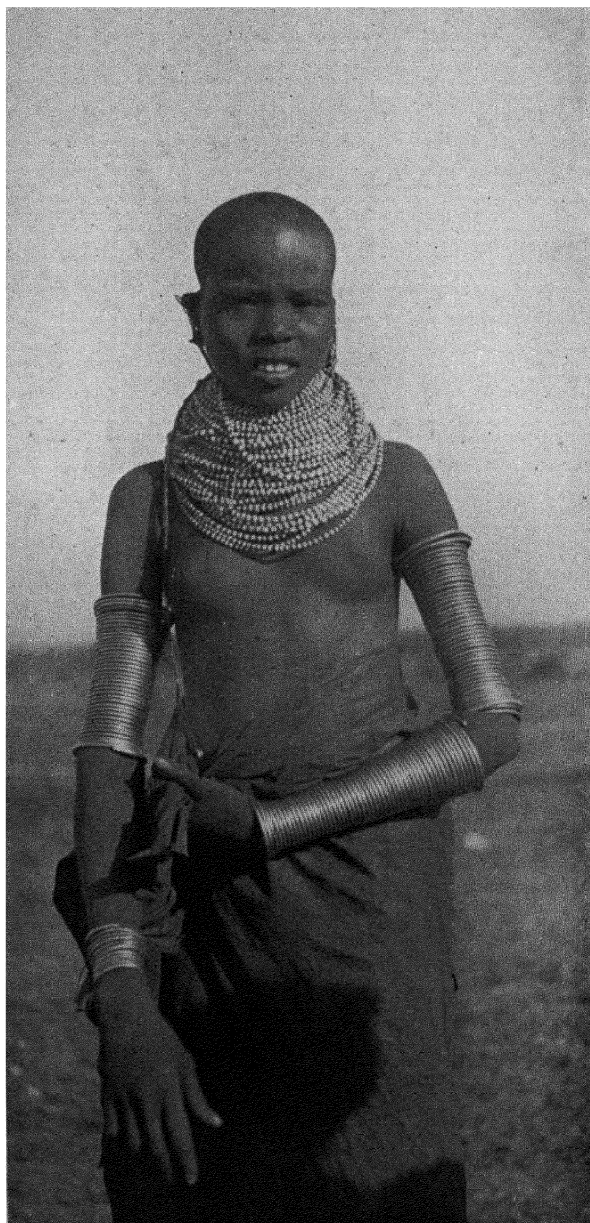
So when I shot my first elephant, I wired to Nairobi for a new licence. I sent in a telegram by two native runners to the nearest railway station and gave them the money to pay for it.

When I came back to Nairobi two weeks later after shooting my second elephant, there was a deal of surprise at seeing me possessed of a second pair of tusks. "What's this?" they said. "You only took out one permit."



Native at Meru





One of the smart set at Meru

## *Sick*

It turned out that my telegram had never arrived. The runners had stolen the money and never turned up at the railway station.

So then and there I reported to the game authorities and explained what had happened. They answered that it was all right, we believe you, but we can't leave things like that; we shall have to ask you to swear an oath in the presence of two witnesses. Which amounted to saying they didn't believe me.

And as I was resting on my journey yesterday at a little place called Isiolo, the resident English official there greeted me cheerfully by saying:

"I've been on the watch for you for a long time. There's been an order from headquarters knocking about my desk instructing me to make you swear an oath about some elephant business, in the presence of two witnesses."

"But look here," I answered, "I can hardly stand on my legs, and am going for the doctor. You can't want to make me swear oaths now, do you?"

"It doesn't take any time," argued the Englishman, "and it doesn't hurt. Just pop into the office with me for a moment and we'll get it all over."

It would be an exaggeration to say that I "popped" into the office. Suffice it that the Englishman besought me so earnestly, as though his whole being depended on this particular oath, that there was nothing for it but to drag myself to the sugar-loaf-shaped reed hut, dignified by the

## *Land of Elephants*

name "office." As witnesses I produced my gun-bearer and my cook. Two worthy niggers who had been present when I sent off the telegram.

The official was a pleasant, girl-faced youth, looking as though he had only yesterday left the clean, green playing-fields of Cambridge. He had actually only come out a month before, and malaria had not yet had time to yellow the picture of him. An ancient, dingy book was growing grey on his writing-table. "Put your hand on the Bible," he said, and off he set reading the oath, and I saying it after him with two fingers on the Bible. It really didn't take long. After that my two men took the oath as well, in Swahili; but as they were Mohammedans, they laid their hands on a big Koran with a tattered binding, instead of on the Bible.

Then we had to sign the typed text of the oath. My two niggers couldn't read or write, so they had to dip their thumbs in ink and sign on the dotted line with their thumb-prints.

I asked the official what he did in the case of non-Mohammedan natives, who of course could swear neither on the Bible nor the Koran.

"Oh, we just tell him we've asked the spirits to kill him on the spot if he doesn't tell the truth."

That, apparently, is supposed to be enough for the superstitious black man. He is so afraid of punishment by the spirits that he does not dare make a false oath.

When we went into the office the Englishman had his hat on, and his pipe in his mouth. So had

## *Sick*

I. When we began the oath I tried to stand up, but the Englishman told me to remain sitting, as we were quite at home. Until then I had thought it was usual to take the official oath only standing, with uncovered head, and, at any rate, without a pipe in your mouth. Here a different fashion reigns, obviously. Customs differ.

The Isiolo magistracy is decidedly a genial place. If only I had not had such fearful gripes.

\* \* \*

The next day: If only I lie quite still, the pains are just bearable. But moving and getting up hurt all the more. And, oh, how often I have to get up!

Under the supervision of the doctor, some fifteen niggers have been preparing an aerodrome close to my hut. They are levelling and smoothing the hummocky field, and here the aeroplane coming for me is supposed to land if it can, and if our telegram has reached Nairobi. In the middle of the field the doctor has painted in six-foot letters: "If unable to land go to Nanyuki," so if the aerodrome here should not be satisfactory the machine will land at Nanyuki, which is about fifty miles away. There are plenty of big fields there where the machine can easily land.

Meru is a beautiful place; I mean it would be without dysentery. It lies high up, at the foot of the forested, snow-tipped Mount Kenya. The air is excellent, and from where I am lying in bed I can see a beautiful chequering of flowers and show of butterflies. Warriors with spears and ivory earrings and feathers stuck in their hair, come and

## *Land of Elephants*

go in front of the open door of my hut; and slender, naked girls, jingling with countless copper bangles. They stop and stare in——

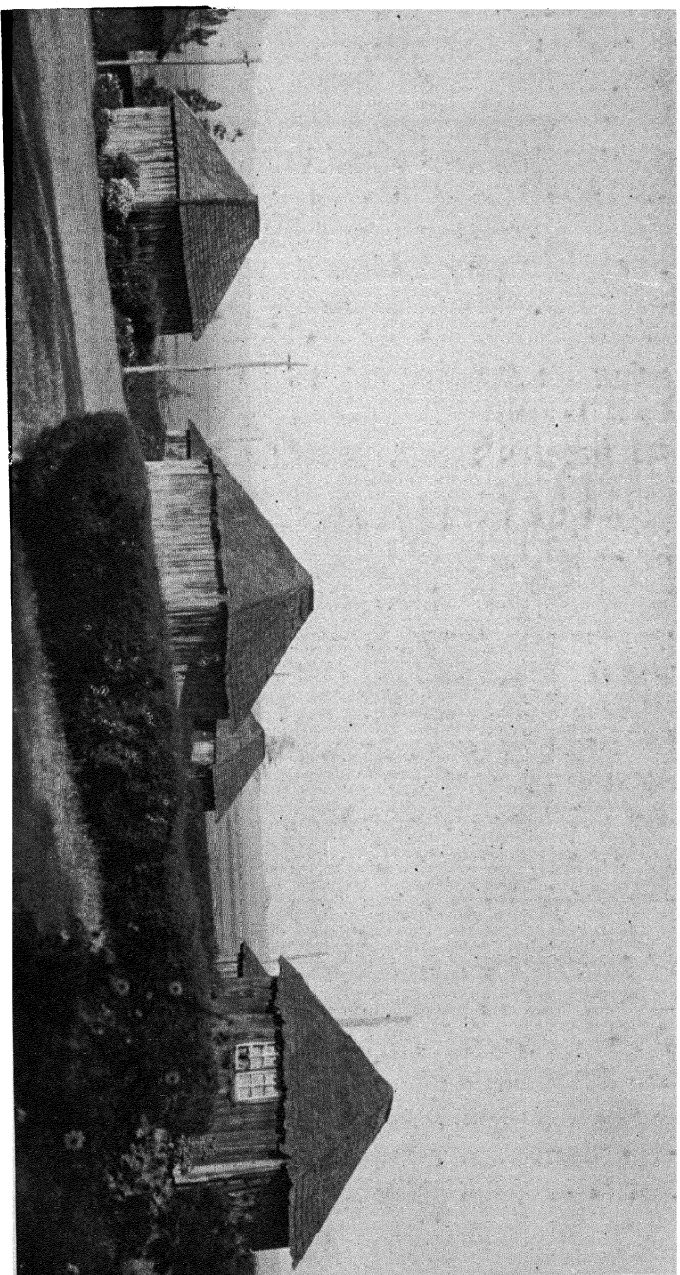
“Bwana mkondjo,” they say. “(Sick master.)”

I can photograph them from where I am lying. And they, for sure, do not have to be tipped for the trouble of undressing themselves before being photographed, as the inhabitants near Nairobi do, who, at the mere sight of a camera, hastily drape themselves with some sort of blanket only in order that in exchange for a substantial tip (to be expended on banana liquor) they may then be induced to part with their garb, to the accompaniment of false squeaks of false modesty. All round Nairobi, thanks to the flood of tourist photographers, the veriest crones have turned so modest that at the approach of a white man they smother their shrivelled carcasses up to the neck and cast down their eyes in the hope that even they may undress themselves in return for money. Undressing before the cameras of tourists is a widespread form of earning money among the native women.

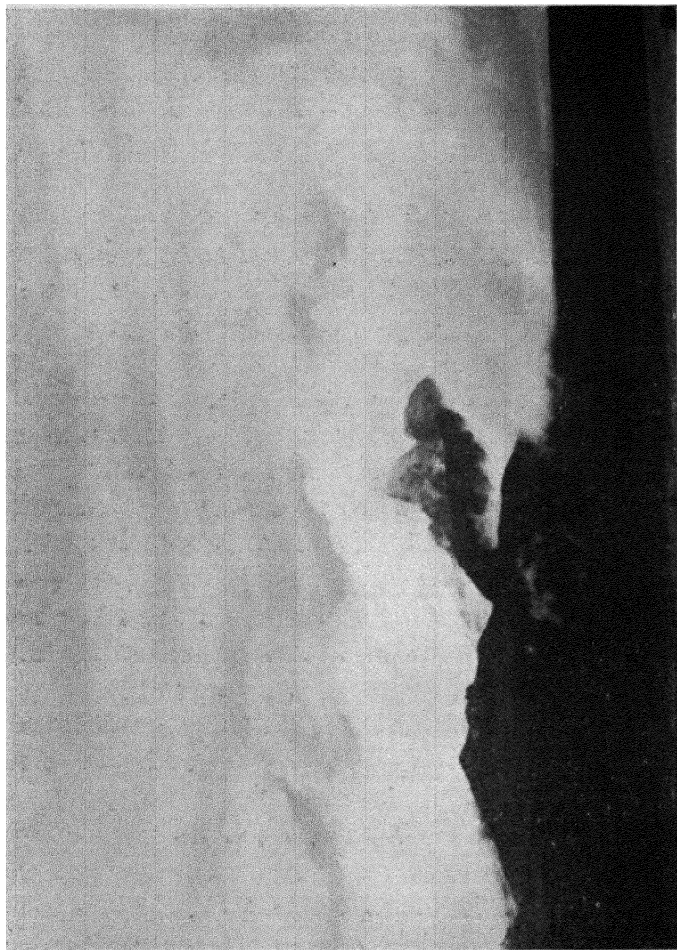
\* \* \*

Two days later: No better. By now I am only living on medicines. Some beastly glyceriny filth every hour.

There was great excitement at noon to-day. The aeroplane came for me; that is, it tried to come, but couldn't land. Twice it circled around the landing ground prepared for it, then it dropped a note saying that it didn't like the look of the place and it was flying back to Nanyuki, and



The "Private Ward," Mernu Hospital



Mount Kenya from Nanyuki

## Sick

that we were to go there. At that it disappeared behind the clouds. I gazed bitterly after it. This afternoon they are going to pack me on the lorry and transport me to Nanyuki.

\* \* \*

The same evening: Nanyuki. Came through the lorry journey comparatively well, but as we didn't arrive here until it was getting dark, the flight has had to be put off until to-morrow.

Here I have been put into the "hotel." Such an hotel of the wilds is the *ne plus ultra* of luxury. Every guest has a separate house. Twelve earthen, reed-roofed huts, of one room each, arranged one beside the other in a semicircle; these are the hotel rooms. They are fairly comfortably fitted out and even have electric light. In the middle of the semicircle of huts rises a reed-roofed bungalow, the "main building," considerably more spacious than the rest. On its open veranda, seated in cheerful, check-covered arm-chairs, some passing hunters are having tea. Inside it is one long room, of which one-half is the dining-room and the other the smoking-room, with a vast fireplace and a crackling fire in it. Outside and inside on the walls hang trophies, buffalo heads, lion skins; by the fireplace some last year's numbers of English illustrated papers. The innkeeper is a retired English naval officer.

On one of the little huts is written "Bar." Besides drinks the naval innkeeper sells tobacco, ammunition, quinine, torch batteries and such-like necessities for the hunters. Comic hunting drawings, poems and sayings adorn the walls of



## *Land of Elephants*

the bar. On the counter is painted a red line indicating the "Equator." Every child in Kenya knows that the Equator runs slap through the counter of the Nanyuki pub.

All this, of course, I cannot observe as I am lying inside my hut. But when I was coming out last time I spent a night here, and two years before that I had turned back at this friendly place. Excellent food, fresh vegetables, fruit, marvellous butter and cream here await the hunter returning from his usual deprivations. But for all I care they can be there or not this time.

If only I were at the hospital.

\* \* \*

Dawn the next day: I couldn't sleep. We are not starting until noon because now the wind is supposed to be rather stiff round the peak of Mount Kenya, and we have got to fly across there. The aeroplane, a tiny, open two-seater silver-coloured Moth, is squatting down there at the end of the field. I can see it from my bed. I am not in the ordinary course of things an enthusiastic aviator, but now I contemplate that little toy bird with the deepest repugnance. Though how eagerly I awaited it.

What's the good of looking at it? I had better turn over on the other side, where, looking into the window, as though made of pink sugar, is the peak of Mount Kenya. Below the peak drift torn clouds, dragging their veil across the upper half of the mountain so that only the dark green lower slopes show, and then above the clouds the gleaming pink summit.

## *Sick*

The scent of dew-washed flowers at dawn floods my room. My hut stands in the middle of a positive sea of flowers: I can pick out from among the brilliant tropical confusion homely verbena, fuchsia, bush geraniums. Tiny white and dark blue-tailed birds and turquoise-coloured butterflies flutter and swoop among the flowers, adding to the whirl of colour. Beautiful, very beautiful, but dysentery doesn't exactly contribute to the beauties of nature.

\* \* \*

Same evening: Nairobi hospital. Now all's well. Now I wouldn't change for . . . for—anyway, I wouldn't change with anybody. They have given me a real bath, and they've put me to bed, and I am in a clean, comfortable little room of my own, in a comfortable bed, and a friendly old nurse is fussing round me. The doctor is an old friend of mine; he has examined me, and told me that besides dysentery I have got malaria, and so now I can kill two birds with one stone. In a fortnight they'll have me fit again, and I can set off hunting once more. Apparently I am not to get anything to eat here either, except rhubarb powder every two hours or so, and my pains are still as bad as ever, but all that now has paled into insignificance. Contentment—thanks to Einstein—is also a relative conception. The Nairobi hospital, in comparison with the last ten days, is salvation itself.

Only a few words about to-day's flight, and it's a pity to waste them. Before we set off they jabbed a dose of morphia into me, unfortunately

## *Land of Elephants*

not a big enough one, tied me into the machine, and in three hours I was here. We flew over close to the Kenya peak, groping blindly through a thick sea of mist surrounding the mountain. When the world round us grew clean and clear once more the pilot set to explaining carefully to me the country passing below us, encouraging me to look out so that I could see below, and even pointing out to me herds of game. But the view didn't interest me. If the biggest elephant in Africa had been strolling about below us, I don't think I should have looked out. And herewith I abolish that flight from my memories.

\* \* \*

To-day it is a week since they brought me here. I am getting better, but slowly enough in all conscience. Though I am being excellently nursed, well cared for, and lack nothing.

There are five nurses. They are neither young nor pretty, but very friendly and take great care of us. They all come to the hospital in their own cars, and in their free time they make a bee-line for the tennis courts or the golf course. I have never seen such passionately sportive nurses. Too much so, thinks the doctor, for they think about hitting balls and so on in the middle of operations.

The hospital is a pretty enough, well-kept building. Twelve patients can be taken in at one time, each in a separate room.

At the moment, besides myself, there are seven other patients: two crashed women flyers—English girls, nineteen or twenty years old, who

## *Sick*

simply set off from London in their little two-seater machine, heading straight for South Africa. One of them had to take French leave, because otherwise she wouldn't have been allowed to do it. They got as far as Kenya, but forty miles from Nairobi they met with ill luck. They were caught by darkness and a storm, and crashed. One of them broke her leg and the other her collar-bone, and the machine was smashed to pieces. They spent the night in the uninhabited wilderness under their machine, without food and without drink, nursing their broken limbs. Luckily they did not take the lions' fancy, though there are plenty of them prowling about there. They had no weapons; not even a pencil. For the next evening two native runners arrived at Nairobi bringing the news of the accident, an S O S written on a rag of silk with a lipstick! That they had got. But no weapons and no food. It was only at dawn the day after that, that the rescue machine sent out from Nairobi found them. Just in time. They were nearly dead of thirst. But by now they are cheerfully playing gramophones out on the terrace, and are only concerned with wondering how, when they get back to London, they can get possession of another aeroplane. With that, they say, they'll have better fun.

Then there is the big-game hunter, Captain C. Lang, who has been here in bed now for a month. A wounded buffalo tossed him, played the devil with him altogether, breaking his pelvis, several ribs, one leg and both arms. There were not many bones in him unbroken. The doctors

## *Land of Elephants*

consider him a miracle, for he survived against all the rules of the game. Now he is whistling cheerfully too, even shuffling about on crutches, impatient to be let loose again on the buffaloes.

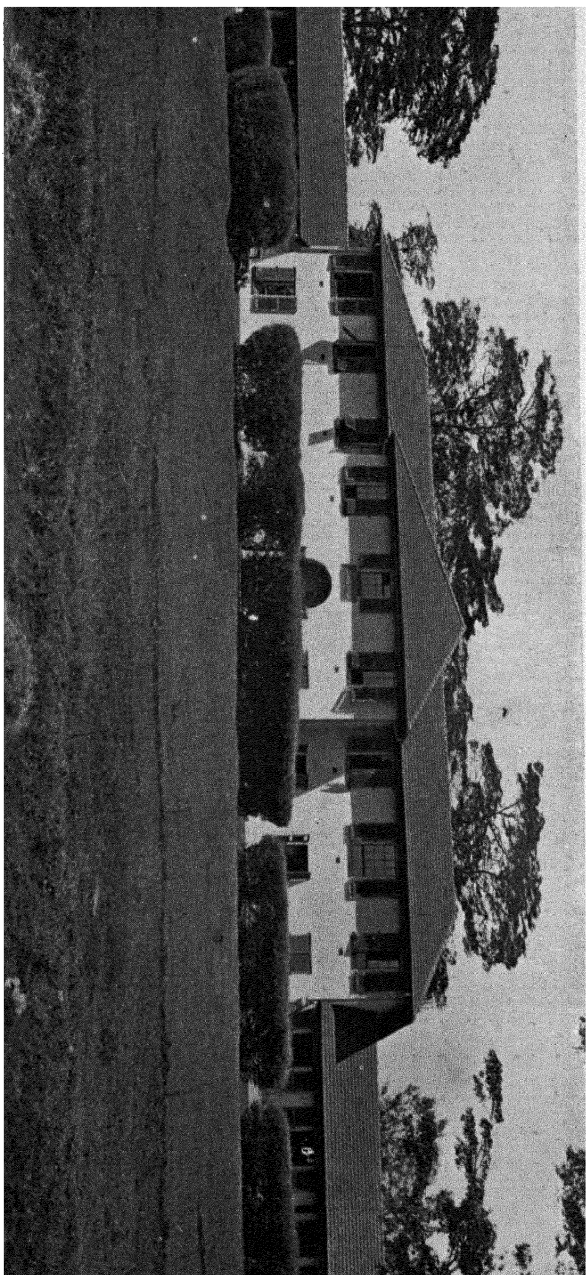
And there is the couple who were stung by the bees. They were brought in quite a short time ago; farmers from the interior who were travelling towards Nairobi in their car, stopped to have their breakfast, when a swarm of wild bees attacked them. They fled in vain, the bees were merciless and stung them so fiercely that the man's eyes swelled up, he drove slap into a tree, the car turned upside down, and the woman's arm was broken. Their faces and hands are all bandaged up and swollen to unrecognisability from the scores of poisonous stings.

Finally there is a missionary suffering from sleeping sickness, and a hunter with blackwater fever. Reluctant as I am to confess it, I am the least interesting patient. Can boast of nothing better than tummy-ache. But that I've got thoroughly, anyway.

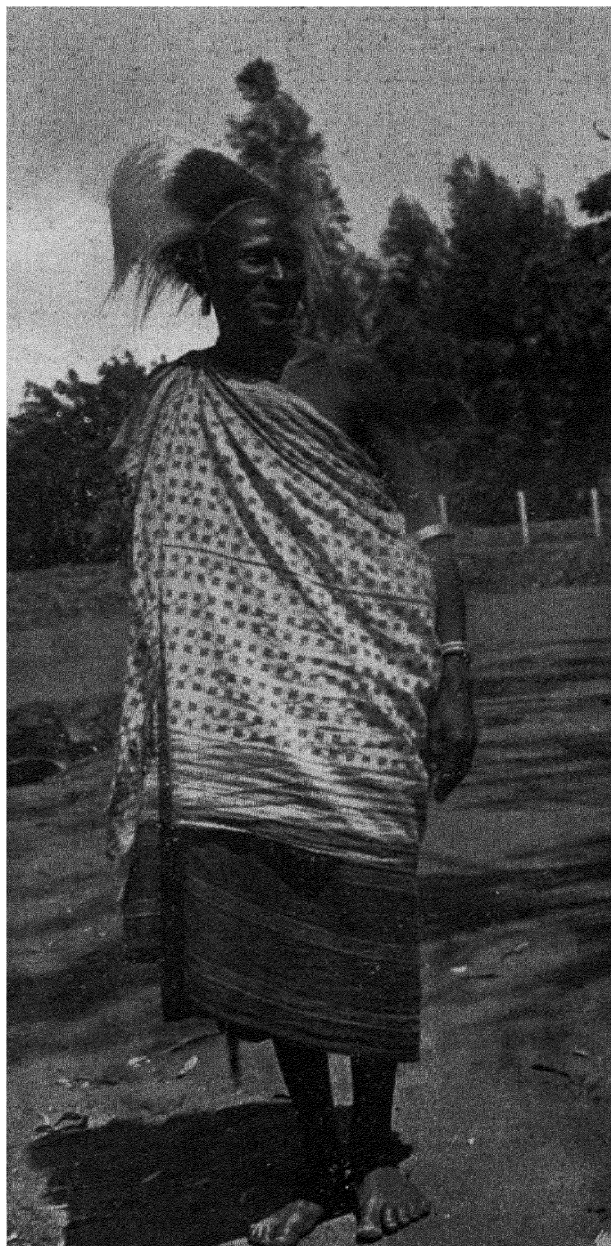
\* \* \*

Ten more days have gone by. In spite of the good nursing, comforts, and cheerful society I am thoroughly sick of this hospital. I want very much to get away. If only I could get stronger. But I am still kept on gruel and that's no food for a hunter. I go for little walks now round the house, but still on very wobbly legs.

When the doctor lets me go—and he promises me that next week—I want to go up to the bamboo



Nairobi Hospital



'Nairobi Dandy

## *Sick*

forest where, last December, I abandoned my unsuccessful bongo hunt. I hear that the weather is not so awful up there now, and it is raining less. Perhaps this time . . .



## CHAPTER VI

### BONGO AGAIN

*The Bamboo Forest. February, 1933.*

I HAVE come back. I have left the Nairobi hospital where I kept my bed for three weeks. Here I am in camp again, 10,000 feet above sea-level in the bamboo jungle, where warm clothing, leaden skies, wet and misty days, and numbingly cold nights give the lie to the tropics, and where after a day of weary scrambling the soaked and shivering hunter can scarce warm his bones, even beside a crackling fire of bamboo logs; where to be dry is practically unknown, and where the vegetation grows in perpetual, unbridled luxuriance, irrespective of season, though at every dawn the world is sugar-coated with hoar-frost; where the mosquito dies of cold, and where consequently there is no malaria. The home of the bongo.

I arrived a little time ago, at dawn, and now we are just finishing pitching our camp. I have settled on the same little clearing as last time. My Wandorobo attendants are also the same, only the warrior linguist being missing, as I could not find him; so conversation with them now languishes. Now they are all squatting here beside me round the fire, with just the whites of their eyes gleaming out from the goat-skin cloaks in which they are muffled. We are all silent and looking at

## *Bongo Again*

the fire. And there is really no reason why we should weary ourselves with gesticulating explanations, for we all know what we want, and we all know what is before us.

A pale, meagrely shining moon slinks about behind the dragon-shaped cloud masses. A drizzling fog of rain obscures the air, and an icy breeze sets the slender bamboo stems rattling and clicking against each other.

Beyond that, there is only the crackling fire to be heard, and occasionally the owl-like shrieks of some wailing hyrax. (These are clawed beasts about the size of a polecat, who perch in the leafy tops of the bamboos and wail and moan all night long.)

Suddenly a tremendous crackling bursts up from the nearby valley. . . .

Then a shrill sort of trumpeting breaks the monotony of the night: elephants, heading down towards the stream, being thirsty.

We are among the elephants again. And after a moment, from this side and that comes their grumbling and trumpeting and crashing. The bamboos break with a great crack before them, snapping like dried twigs under a man's foot.

I am already half asleep, but the din of the elephants goes on; and I fear they must be frightening away my timid, sound-shy bongo—if there is such a thing as a bongo anywhere near. A herd of elephants at night are a vulgar, noisy company. Especially here where nobody harries them. And I have more wood put on the fire to make them sheer off.

\* \* \*

## *Land of Elephants*

The bamboo stems are white with hoar-frost and the dawn is misty and chill when I leave my camp. I am all too soon rid of the little heat which the camp-fire imparted to me before I set off. At home we should take no account of such weather, but here on the Equator it sets one a-shivering. And moreover I am still out of condition, for my four weeks of illness brought down my strength considerably.

The morning wakes sallow, colourless, sleepy and unwilling. It sneaks into the world almost unnoticed, shuffling along like a tired grey beggar. The sun is not to be seen and might as well not have risen. One can only tell from the compass which way is east, for the sky there is no brighter than anywhere else.

In among the bamboos it is still so dark that I can hardly see my own feet, let alone the tracks of the bongo. We come out on a swampy clearing, sit down, and I smoke a cigarette and wait for it to get light. And suddenly, as though doing it for my especial benefit, the mist begins to clear. The morning suddenly takes heart, clears its brow of the gloomy clouds, and smiles out on the world. That sudden beam sweeps away the banks of vapour, sprinkles a golden dust among the thinning mist, kindles a bright jewel in every drop of dew. On the streamers of moss that hang from the rough bark trees the rime glitters like the sparkling cotton-wool of a Christmas tree. The sun!

The light grows stronger, the clouds slip down towards the valleys, the hoar-frost turns to dew, the moss beards to dripping streamers, the sky

## *Bongo Again*

grows blue, and such a clear blue that Mount Kenya, two hundred miles away, stands out whitely against it. I have never seen the bamboo forest decked out in such extravagant luxury of light.

But then such a gleaming show does not last long. The sun grows grave again and draws a veil of clouds across his face; and the millions of light flowers grow dull, and leaden greyness settles again over the land.

We dropped down towards the bottom of the valley beside the stream. Down there the bamboos were like a field of corn after a hailstorm, so trampled and battered and crushed by the elephants. Broken stems lay criss-cross one on top of the other, so that it was a positive feat of gymnastics to climb through and over them. On the heights of the farther side even now the monsters of the forest were crashing about, and I could see how they were shaking the tops of the bamboos, and watch how every now and again a tree crest disappeared as the elephants bent and broke the lower trunk in their passage.

They had made just such a furious confusion of the course of the stream, breaking down so many bamboo trunks across the stream that we could only just get along it. We were following the watercourse; here, in the mud of the bank, we hoped to find tracks of the bongo.

We peered and searched and peered, but in vain. I got so exhausted by the perpetual climbing that I had to sit down and rest, and I sent the Wandorobos on to search ahead and come back for me if they found any fresh tracks.

## *Land of Elephants*

I sat down on the bank of the stream among the wet nettles, and sincerely hoped that my men would not find any tracks, for I felt I was incapable of going once again for that precipitous mountain-side. I was still very much at the hospital stage.

The bamboos above me rustled, and an old blue-grey monkey squatted above my head. He had not noticed me, and still thought he was alone in his forest. He had got very wet in the night. He was very cold and was waiting in vain for the drying sunshine. A more pitiful sight than that very damp old monkey would be hard to imagine. All the despair in the world was concentrated in his bitter, wrinkled countenance. There was never a monkey from whom the thought of monkeying was further removed.

I contemplated the old fellow with interest. I would have liked to enter into conversation with him. If I had patiently listened to all his complaints, and had won his confidence, he would have told me of wonders and secrets of the forest such as we never imagine. He seemed a very wise old monkey. He might even have told me how to shoot a bongo. He would know, if anybody did.

But my Wandorobos came back and scared the monkey before I had time to address him. They brought bad news. There were fresh bongo tracks quite close. We must go at that infernal great mountain again.

In the mud of the stream even I could clearly recognise the hoof-prints of my mystery animal, but when I plunged behind my men into the nettle thickets and the vast confusion of the bamboo

## *Bongo Again*

covered mountainside, I, for my part, could not see the slightest sign of the bongo's passing. But we were on his tracks, and, indeed, the guides were pressing forward ahead of me so fast that I could hardly keep up. Nothing but here and there a broken nettle, a freshly bent twig, a drop of mud splashed on a frond were the signs they followed, but they went forward as steadily as though they were tracking in fresh snow.

For five hours we slid and scrambled and pushed through that infernal confusion of bamboos and nettles—all in vain. Finally my legs gave up and I had to flop down and rest. When half an hour later I staggered to my feet again, my Wandorobos informed me that we were by then very far from the camp and we should have a deal of trouble getting back again, so let us follow the track of the bongo as long as daylight lasts, and then sleep there on the spot, so that we could take up the trail again at dawn.

"Not on your life," I said. "Not for all the bongos in Kenya! That's the last straw! To expect me to sleep here on one of these numbingly cold nights, without food and without a single blanket, all among the nettles. I'm going to have my supper in camp to-day, even if I never learn what a bongo looks like. Even if you have to carry me home on your backs. Come on. Pronto!"

So back we turned, to the accompaniment of scornful grumbling on the part of the trackers who could never understand my anxieties concerning accommodation at night.

Off we went, trudging along, or rather we would

## *Land of Elephants*

have, if we could have. We groped, and we slithered back, and we squeezed up gullies, and crawled through impenetrable looking thickets. It was a journey full of vicissitudes. I cursed everything down to the discoverer of that blasted bongo.

Finally we strayed into a steep-sided, trap-like crater where even the natives were at a loss. They said I had better wait for a little and they would scramble up to the top and look round to see which was the best way out. Go on, thought I, I can at any rate rest meanwhile.

But there was no resting. For my guides had scarcely disappeared when suddenly from their direction came a terrific clamour. . . .

The bamboos were crackling like machine-guns. The noise headed straight for me, and the men started shouting: "Bongo, Bongo. . .!"

I had just time to jump to my feet, and the crackling and smashing was right in front of me . . . but I could see nothing . . . one needs X-ray eyes for this soulless jungle. . . .

Then a flash of red, scarcely four paces from me—and into it I hurriedly let drive. A second—just time to shove another cartridge into the breech—and again a red gleam hurled itself after the other. And again I let drive into it.

I shot quite blindly. Bang into the crashing and confusion. It might have been anything for all I knew, for I'm dashed if I knew what I was shooting at.

But it was a bongo. A real, genuine, jungle-bred bongo. Not a hundred paces away, they both lay dead. True that one of them was a cow, and the

## *Bongo Again*

other a young bull, but both bongos all the same. It all happened so quickly that I did not know which to go for.

Such can be hunter's luck. It was a mere chance that the legendary beast happened to be just where my trackers were stumbling about looking for a way out of our crater.

The bongos, hurling themselves away from the noise, made straight for me. If they had passed only a few yards farther off I would never have had a chance to shoot.

It was night when I sat down again beside my camp-fire. We had lost our way again coming home. We had been stampeded by elephants and I had lost my coat. Suffice it to say that we staggered into camp with the two bongo's heads. There was no need of supper. Only bed.

But the day after to-morrow evening I too shall be talking in the bar in Nairobi about how simple it is to go shooting bongo. Child's play! Why, in one day I shot two!



## CHAPTER VII

### PREOCCUPATIONS OF AN AFRICAN STATION-MASTER

*November, 1933.*

FROM the most important harbour of the eastern coast, Mombasa, a railway leads into the interior of the black continent. The Kenya-Uganda Railway.

This railway was built between 1898 and 1900, with an interruption of one month when the ravages of two man-eating lions completely put a stop to further work. Of the gang of imported Indian coolie workers, several hundred strong, in the course of one month no less than twenty-nine fell victims to the two animals, until at last the English Colonel, J. H. Patterson, succeeded in accounting for the fearful beasts. In Patterson's famous book, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*, he gives a detailed account of the month-long reign of terror which put a stop to all work on the railway construction.

Those two lions achieved a remarkable distinction. They are the only lions which have occupied the attention of the British House of Lords. After they had been killed, the Prime Minister, at that time Lord Salisbury, devoted quite a long speech to the doings of the man-eaters of Tsavo and Patterson's courageous hunt.

I too have met the man-eaters of Tsavo, though

### *Preoccupations of an African Station-Master*

only stuffed. (That is, *they* were stuffed.) I saw them in the Chicago Field Museum in a glass case. Ugly, maneless, broken-toothed, mangy old beasts. Nobody would imagine from looking at them that they ate twenty-nine Indians in the course of one month.

It is thirty-two years since the man-eaters of Tsavo were killed, but along the course of the Uganda Railway the ravages of lions have not quite ceased ever since. Every now and again, even now, the descendants of the snarling gap-toothed beasts of the glass case in Chicago appear, and even nowadays terrorise the inhabitants of the lonely railway station.

At the headquarters of the railway in Nairobi they keep all sorts of interesting mementos of the history of the eight hundred mile track, which even now is for the greater part laid through virgin wilderness. Among other things, they show one there two telegrams. One of them was sent by the station-master of the desert halt called Simba (lion) to the headquarters at Nairobi. (The officials of the Uganda Railway are ninety per cent. Indians.) It runs something like this:

“Lion on platform last three nights trying to open door office please send first train ball cartridges self-defence last remission blank no good.”

Apparently at headquarters they had considered that lust of hunting might distract the station-master from his official duties, and so had sent the unfortunate man blank cartridges.

## *Land of Elephants*

The other telegram was also sent from some distant station, by the Indian telegraphist, something like this:

“Station-master eaten by lion platform am in office impossible despatch load coffee at present please wire instructions.”

I learn that the station-masters have recently been permitted to carry arms. And all along the railway there is now the popping of rifles. But only very rarely is there a lion accounted for.

African station-masters have such little anxieties. The home variety is better off, even if he is quartered at the most distant little Puddle-in-the-Marsh. No lion drags him out of his office.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GREATER KUDU

ABOUT noon on the 20th December, 1933, two rickety lorries were sitting quietly in the mud of the "road" at the bottom of Mount Kenya.

The two vehicles had set out on a long trip. They were heading north towards Lake Rudolf about five hundred miles away. Their goal the 9,000-foot Mount Khulal which rises at the southern corner of the Lake. But if they were to go on as they were going they would not be there this time next year. Since morning the rain had been lashing them in exactly the same place, and they had been sitting up to the axles in exactly the same black, bottomless puddle. This was the third day since they left their starting-place, Nairobi, and they had covered altogether under a hundred miles.

I could have got as far on foot in that time. Yes, I was the traveller in those two lorries, or rather in only one of them, having in the other two mules with which I intended to transport my belongings to the top of Mount Khulal, if I ever got there. For the moment there was nothing but the steady, close, tropical rain, a rolling mist blanketing the country, a wet and sopping world all round, and not a sign of the leaden sky clearing.

It was getting dark, but the rain paid no

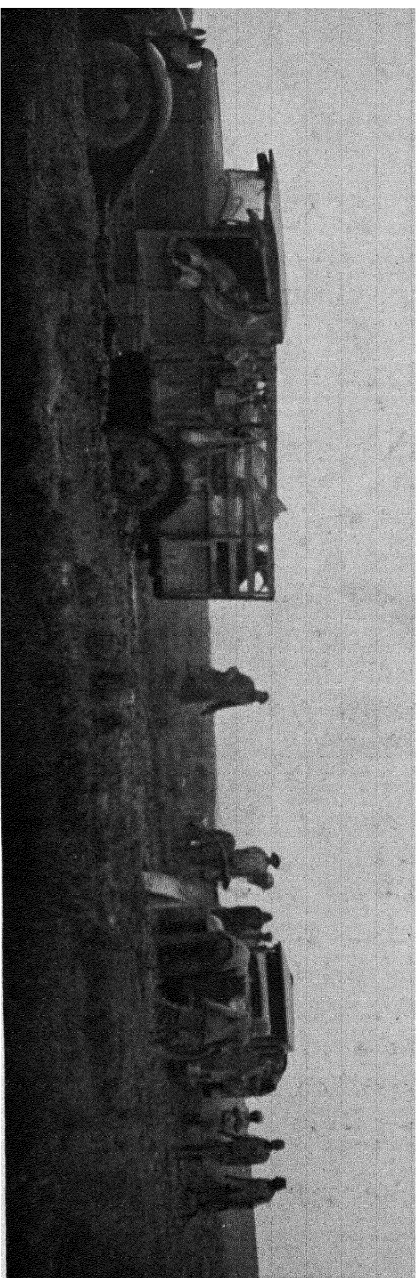
## *Land of Elephants*

attention, and we did not leave the lorries. It would be madness to set up a tent in such a down-pour, and to make a fire. Everything would be reduced to pulp the moment we took it out of the lorries. I would not even have liked to uproot my shivering, half-naked boys, crowded in behind me on the top of the lorry, between the luggage and the rain-proof tarpaulin. About twelve of them, keeping each other warm.

To cut a long story short we slept there in the lorries as we sat. A sort of supper was produced from the bottom of a knapsack, and after that my friend and I smoked a pipe or so sitting beside one another, and then beside the steering wheel we said "good night."

It was no use: it was not a good night. But when dawn came the rain had stopped. We could not see whether the sun had risen or not, and the grey mist still hung in unbroken uniformity round us. We could hardly make out the road: the ruts had turned to parallel streams, a welter of splashing, dirty brown mud.

But the rain had actually stopped. Exhausted. Or at any rate we thought so. And we set to freeing the lorries. We dug out the wheels one by one, jacked them up, filled in the abyss below them with stones, logs, and bundles of weeds, then under the combined efforts of the motor and the whole company of workers the first vehicle jerked out of its resting place, only to bury itself deeper than ever in the black and sticky mire. When, after long efforts, we eventually succeeded in shifting it, with it, and with the help of a rope, we hauled



Get ready!—



Heave!

## *The Greater Kudu*

out the other lorry. So we dragged ourselves forward a couple of hundred yards, and then progress ceased once more. That sort of thing is remarkably entertaining. Good for the nerves. And they call that motoring.

We entertained ourselves in this fashion until evening; and the day after, just in case we should get a little too confident; and the day after that the same good fortune accompanied our progress. Differing good fortune, as a matter of fact, for sometimes we used one lorry to haul out the other, and sometimes we used the other to haul out the one, not counting, of course, when both of them got stuck at the same time. Then we would return to the digging-out process, wheel by wheel.

And the rain—was damned if it held off. As soon as it had rested a little it set to work and took up its road-making operations with more zeal than ever. African rain is not a normal sort of rain, such as we know it, which keeps within the bounds of decency. This, if it once begins again after a period of inactivity, shows you how it really can rain. For all it cares, the bemired hunter at the bottom of Mount Kenya can tear his hair out. It knows no mercy.

This is a country of settlers, with a flourishing sheep-breeding industry. Great flocks of sheep graze side by side with the herds of zebra and antelope. I only mention these flocks because of their shepherds, for such modern shepherds are not to be found on the most civilised of European pastures. True, they are more or less naked, have rings in their noses and a spear in one hand. But



## *Land of Elephants*

in the other hand—what do you think is in the other?

What should a good shepherd hold in his other hand on a rainy day? What else but an umbrella! Yes, an umbrella! And that you may the more easily believe it, there is the photograph I took on the spot. A fine, silk-covered, European umbrella. In the heart of Africa.

Apparently in Kenya shepherd circles the umbrella is very much the fashion, for all the shepherds we met that day were squatting under their umbrellas. And from there they laughed at us. Their imaginations did not extend to thinking of helping us push the lorries.

The day after that a miracle happened. The sun came out. Losing patience, out he flared, and that was the end of the rain. He swept aside the mists and even tore down the wisps of vapour clinging to Mount Kenya; the white, 20,000-feet snowy monster gleamed out from among the clouds as though carved out of alabaster.

All this did not for the moment make very much difference to the state of the road, or rather to the earth, for there was only the site of the road left. But at any rate, it did not get any worse. The equatorial sun has nothing to learn about drying processes. It dried up the earth so quickly that by evening we were trundling forward at quite a good speed, and by dusk we were setting up our camp on the banks of the Northern Guaso-Nyiro river.

At the sight of the river we had a surprise. It had completely cast off its usual discreetly gurgling

## *The Greater Kudu*

twenty-foot wide character, and had swollen to a broad, tearing, evilly-roaring flood. Its troubled, whirling torrent had wrenched out trees from its banks, and it was foaming and tossing through its narrowed bed. We had to put off crossing till the next day, trusting that, as the rain had stopped, the river would have dropped by morning.

After our long drenching it was good to spend an evening under a clear starry sky, and to dry our rain-pulped belongings before the leaping camp-fire. But after rain the mosquitoes are countless. And they quickly drove us under our mosquito nets. From there we listened to the angry rushing of the swollen river, and, far away, the occasional distant broken rumbling of a couple of hunting lions.

\* \* \*

By dawn, as we expected, the Guaso-Nyiro had quietened and had fallen considerably. We crossed without any major incident, lorries, mules and all. And when we had filled every vessel we had with the coffee-coloured river water, we set out on the worst stage of our journey, the waterless and trackless Khaisut desert.

To begin with it was easy enough; in the sand of the desert two dead straight parallel lines are marked out with the lava stones that lie about there, and in between them is the "road." The two stone lines run straight as a ruler into the distant unknown, like a railway line. As long as the stones last, a blind man could follow them, but after half a day's journey, they suddenly stop. Civilisation has got no further, has given up and

## *Land of Elephants*

expired in the desert. It felt as though we had suddenly debouched from the course of a canal into the open sea, where landmarks are no more and the compass is all one is left with. With the help of the latter we followed straight on in the direction pointed by those lines of stones, and on the evening of the third day, after a series of minor checks, we emerged happily from the desert.

The sun was already sinking when some yellowish animals, at first glance of unknown origin, appeared on the horizon. They quickly resolved themselves into big herds of camels. We knew from what we had heard that they must be the camels of a wandering tribe called the Borans. At the approach of our noisy vehicles they fled panic-stricken, their long-legged herdsmen with them. It was only after lengthy gesticulation and the yelling of our interpreter's few Boran words that they stopped and entered into negotiations with us. These Borans cannot have seen a car before, and, perhaps, never even a white man. And for some time they watched us very mistrustfully, hesitated and appeared to be taking council. But then they planted their spears in the ground—that is how the savage proclaims his friendly intentions—and from a distance of two hundred yards held out their hands to us. So they came nearer, with long springy strides, their teeth flashing in a welcoming grin, ostrich feathers stuck in their hair, right hands stretched out to us.

I was surprised at these pleasant, slender men's quiet, modest way of speaking. They never spoke more than one at a time—what about, we could

## *The Greater Kudu*

not understand—slowly and gravely. They never interrupted one another. To the questions put to them by our interpreter they always answered after a short pause, after thoroughly considering the answer. They were a pleasant contrast to our Swahilis, who jabber away the whole time like a pack of monkeys. When we asked them where the object of our journey, the Khulal Mountain, was they pointed with pursed lips to the way or rather to the mountain itself, for, very pale blue in the haze of the distance, there could just be seen the faint shape of the uplands.

After we had learnt with some satisfaction in the course of conversation that at the foot of the mountain we should find some more Borans, who, or rather whose camels could transport our belongings up the mountain, we ended the “sauri,” and set up our camp there and then. The Borans presented us with leather bottles of freshly-milked camels’ milk—and oh, how horrible it was, though given with such good grace—then, leaning on their spears and standing on one leg, they watched us set up our camp, while with silent dignity they chewed the quid tobacco we had given them in return for the camels’ milk.

We woke to a splendid dawn, and there on the horizon stood Mount Khulal, distinct and solitary. But we travelled on all day without stopping before we reached its foot. We had taken ten full days to do the five hundred miles from Nairobi; that is, counting ten hours’ driving a day, an average speed of five miles per hour, which can hardly be called a dizzy rate of progress.

## *Land of Elephants*

That same evening a few Boran camel-drivers ventured into the light of our camp-fire. And we promptly came to an agreement with them that at dawn they should bring five baggage-camels for us, the hire to be paid in tobacco, salt, and the meat of the game we were to shoot.

When it grew light, there, quite close, were the lower slopes of the thickly forested mountain. For the moment its head was covered in a white cloud-cap. We knew it was 8,000 feet high, so we ought to be at the top by evening, if . . .

But in Africa, you must know, there are as many "ifs" as there are holes in a sieve.

It took us an hour and a half to load all our baggage on to the five camels.

I know from experience that there are such things as good camels. But they are clearly not to be found among the Borans. The Boran camel is a pig-headed, bad-tempered, snapping beast, who regards having a load put on his back as a personal insult and receives every package as it is tied into place with scornful gruntings and an angry glare. The Boran camel, as will presently appear, is a dark blot on the camel escutcheon. The scum of camel society.

It is well known that a camel can only be loaded lying down if one doesn't take a ladder to it. Our camels began by simply refusing to get up when they felt the load on their backs. With an unmistakable expression of infinite disgust, they hissed at us like so many angry snakes, paying not the slightest attention to the encouragements poured on them by their drivers. And the drivers were

## *The Greater Kudu*

not lacking, God wot! They tried everything on earth that the human imagination can conceive for the purpose of shifting stubborn camels. They tried flattery, they tried threats, they tried cunning temptation, they tried the most awful language. They tried pulling, pushing, beating and prodding them with their spears. The camels only laughed. They put a noose round the camel's nose and on that they pulled while into one ear they whispered abuse, and into the other they whispered blandishments; they spat chewed tobacco leaves into the beasts' faces, they joined hands and danced round them in their efforts to hypnotise them into action. But not even magic was any good on those camels. The poor Borans turned helplessly to us for a remedy. But how should I know how to shift a Boran camel?

While we were looking at one another like that there came the climax to the whole camel business. One of the Boran camel-owners—an ingenious youth—with the blood-lust in his eye, let out a shriek, hurled himself at his inexorable camel, squatted down behind it and bit its tail. Bit it good and hard. That must have been something new to the camel, for, lying down as it was, it landed that carnivorous Boran such a sideways kick as robbed the poor fellow of all desire of further camel-taming. The incident was received with indescribable glee, everybody doubling up with laughter. The hero of the incident was, of course, the insulted camel, for his bull's-eye effort first shot. The other camels were as pleased as anything about the affair, grinned maliciously and

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put all thought of getting up farther than ever from their minds.

We had to unpack everything off them, whereupon without waiting for any command they all got up and began stretching luxuriously. So we set to work with different methods. We made the camels lie down again, but after loading each separate package on to them we got them up again, then laid them down once more. That was the only way to bamboozle the beasts, for they could not realise when the complete load was on their backs.

In single file we started off for the mountain. First the five camels, each under the guard of two Borans, one of them hauling on a rope and the other prodding the beast in the stern with his spear. Only the last camel had no one behind it, its attendant having stayed at the foot of the mountain feeling his ribs and displaying no further interest in the progress of his animal.

That was a weary climb. Not the mountain's fault. Exclusively the camels'. When they got tired of climbing—and they got tired every half-hour—they just lay down and stayed there as long as they wanted. If the first one lay down those behind him immediately followed his example. And all the time they kept looking round so that if anyone at the rear should lie down, the front ones should know what to do.

Whoever imagines that we had overloaded the unfortunate beasts till they protested against the weight, is wrong. I assure you they were not carrying half a camel's worth. In the Sudan and

## *The Greater Kudu*

in Egypt the decrepittest and ancientest and wretchedest of camels carry twice as much as these were carrying. They were simply disgusted with the whole affair, and made us unmistakably aware of it. Tangibly and emphatically so. I have seen camels who could kick, but camels who could kick with whichever leg of the four was most applicable to the situation, and which could kick in all directions at the same time, such I had never seen. Every one of our five camels were capable of such acrobatics. They were past masters of kicking. Yet in their progress they seemed to be as fearful of their legs, raising them painfully one after another, as though their every stride were agony. Those were unpleasant camels.

We ourselves, however, left the villainous brood behind. Our sturdy little riding-mules were so pleased to find themselves climbing after being ten days in the lorries, and scrambled and scuffled so nimbly, that we reached the top before daylight had gone. Of course there was no sign of our belongings. They were somewhere down below on the side of the mountain with those awful camels.

We were at the top. While we were climbing, the air had grown quickly cooler, but up here a positively numbing wind was blowing. Muffled in thick coats, we admired the wonderful scene spread out before us. We looked down dizzy steeps into long gorges reminiscent of North American canyons, and in the distance where the gorges shrank and descended to the plain there gleamed a far-reaching, silver mirror-surface: Lake Rudolf.

This was the Lake Rudolf which our compatriot



## *Land of Elephants*

Count Samuel Teleki discovered. He and a German companion contributed this vast lake to the map of Africa in 1888. The two hundred mile stretch of water reaches right up to the confines of Sudan and Abyssinia, its eastern shore being administered by Kenya, and its western by Uganda.

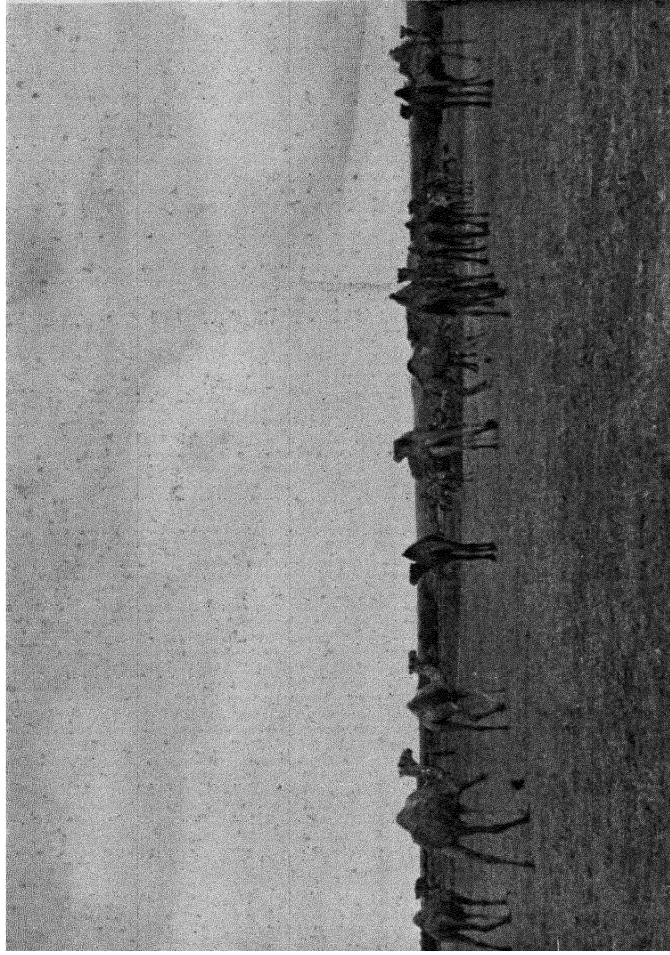
I stared for a long time out over this great district which is even now practically virgin, which has seen but few white men, is inhabited by only a very few natives, where the last expedition was a year ago, so that my intrusion was disturbing a natural peace a full year old. We thought with admiration of Count Samuel Teleki starting from the eastern shore forty-five years ago, and arriving where we were, on foot, after spending nearly a year exploring his way through the land. I suppose that the hunters who in the near future arrive here after a half-day's flight, will for their part think with some pity, if not with wonder, of our ten-days' motor trip. And I hope that for them the Boran camel will not exist outside a museum.

We retreated from the biting wind to the shelter of a big rock. And there we cursed all the camels that ever were. We had neither tent nor food, and already the sinking sun was half submerged in Lake Rudolf and the wind was dragging inky monsters of cloud towards us from the east.

We were wet through. It grew dark. We shivered and cursed the camels. We gave up trying to make a fire. In the darkness we could not find much to make it of, and what we could find, would not burn. Our only consolation was that we were in



Every half-hour they got tired of Climbing



Boran Camels

## *The Greater Kudu*

Africa, where moods always vary between extremes. Calm follows quickly after storm. And that was what happened.

For when, towards midnight, from the hopelessness of the wet darkness there emerged the disgusting rumbling of our camels and the "Ah-Ah-Ah," of their drivers, our spirits suddenly rose. And, later, when the rain had left off and we were eating supper in a change of clothes by the comforting warmth of a crackling camp-fire, we had not a curse left in us. We even conceived an affection for our camels.

Our night's rest was short and horribly cold. Although we had a fire burning at each end of the tent it was a real "three blanket" night. We always used to gauge the temperature of the nights by the necessity for blankets. On this occasion we really needed more than three, but we had not got them. When it dawned, down came the rain again, and the top of the mountain wrapped itself in such a mixture of thick mist and low cloud that for the moment all hunting seemed out of the question.

But it occurs to me that I have not yet mentioned why we have come up here. For it was not the view of Lake Rudolf that induced us to make this weary journey. Nor even the desire for a closer study of the Boran camel. But—the Greater Kudu.

The greater kudu, the finest and noblest antelope of Africa, which in all Kenya is to be found only here, at the top of Mount Khulal, is a beast with big corkscrew-like horns then unrepresented in my collection of trophies. In body,

## *Land of Elephants*

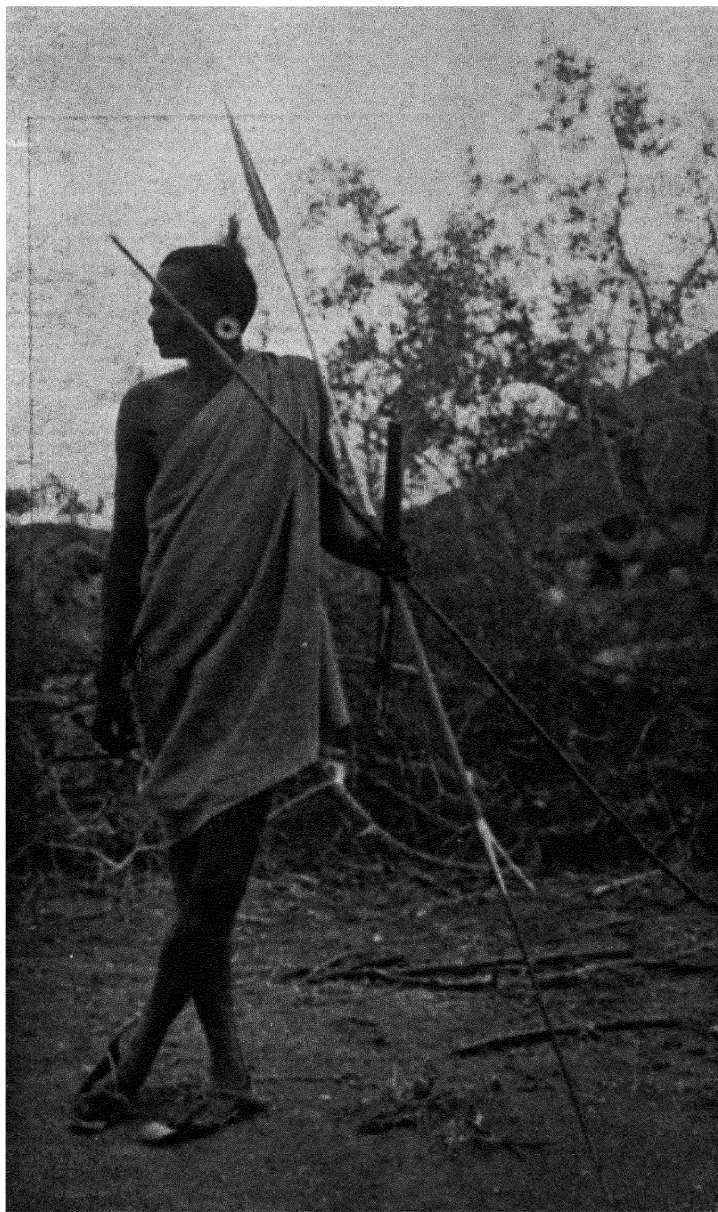
the greater kudu is about the size of our own stags at home. Its brown-grey coat has oblique stripes of white; the old bull bears heavy horns over a yard long, and has a beautiful, hanging black beard to his chin. It was this rare beast, of which the Kenya game laws allow one to shoot only one specimen, that lured us to this distant mountain top.

In spite of the unceasing rain and the thick mist, we set off to have a look round. We could not have stayed in the tent in any case, for they were taking it down to remove it from the cold, wind-swept mountain top to the shelter of a nearby gully. So we would have got wet through in any case.

Our two mules came with us and, whenever the ground permitted, we took advantage of them; and we did not return home until evening.

It is a magnificent place; I am glad I came up here. Kudu or no kudu it would be worth while climbing this mountain. Merely for the air, for one thing. One is positively reborn after the heat down below.

And the vegetation. Bright green "Alpine" pastures—which have never seen snow, though—alternate with dark unpenetrated jungles. Everything is a wanton confusion of luxuriance. And the trees—torn, gnarled veterans of many a storm—are all clothed in a warm garment of moss. Every single tree-trunk, branch and thinnest twig is wrapped in a dark green moss sheath. As though careful hands had packed them all in green cotton-wool. And on the velvety branches hang pale



Boran Camel-herd



The Insulted Camel

## *The Greater Kudu*

green beards of moss, flax shreds hung up to dry, tattered wind-torn banners of countless aerial battles. Such a moss-swathed forest is a strange sight. I wonder whether the moss covering protects the tree or sucks its blood?

But we did not come here for the sake of the moss. Quite soon, after searching for scarcely an hour, we came on the first herd of kudu. They were lying on a steep slope by a big white block of rock, five cows and a young buck not worth shooting. After that we saw no more than two old cows the whole day long. It is true that the rain kept coming on again, and about five separate storms swept down on us, the enveloping clouds shrouding everything in such darkness that we could not see a stone's throw ahead. So it was only a glimpse we had of the two cow kudus I have just mentioned; they were separated from us by a wide bottomless gorge, and no sooner had we spotted them than a large-sized cloud sailed in between us and hid them from view. We saw nothing more in that direction, though there might have been a bull with them.

We found a tremendous quantity of buffalo tracks. According to the signs, however, the buffaloes only come out on to the open pastures at night, and in the daytime keep close in the jungle.

When, some time after sunset, soaked through and chilled to the bone, we bumped towards home and at last caught sight of the glow-worm-like glimmer of our camp-fire at the bottom of its sheltered gully, we were heartily glad. I cannot



## *Land of Elephants*

tell you what that shabby little canvas tent, that crackling fire and the plate of hot soup means to a tired hunter. Everything. Supreme luxury. Complete contentment. The banishment of all trouble in that unending wilderness and blind, hopeless darkness. The ideal home!

The next day we woke to a freezing cold but clear dawn, and when the rising sun shot its first gilding ray to the mountain top we were already sitting up there ready to rake the mountainsides and peaks with our field-glasses. And after long searching we succeeded in spotting a big, lonely kudu bull with a fine head—only standing at the top of the farthest peak from us, at least a mile away as the crow flies. From where we were it looked no bigger than a beetle, but for all that we could make out the corkscrew shaped horns sweeping back to more than the middle of its body, fit to make our mouths water. We had scarcely been watching it more than a minute when it set off and plunged into the forest.

As there was nothing nearer to be seen we set off for the peak which was the retreat of that kudu. Such mountainous country easily deceives one. For instance we could have sworn that there were only two peaks between us and the kudu. There were actually four. I am no hiker, and I would never go up a mountain without a rifle, so it is understandable that I did not receive the unexpected necessity of scrambling up the third and fourth peaks with remarkable enthusiasm. I did not precisely yodel with glee. In fact, at the fourth mountain I was swearing that not

## *The Greater Kudu*

for all the crooked-horned kudu in the world would I climb another one. But an oath under such circumstances must not be considered as binding.

Anyway, we reached the place where the kudu had walked into the forest five hours earlier. We found his tracks and set off after him. Quite soon the trail turned into a well trampled buffalo path and we followed it along a long, forested ridge.

We had been following the trail for, perhaps, half an hour when the tracker in front of me suddenly "froze." He stood there on one leg, and the other, which he was just moving forward, stopped where it was in mid-air, like a pointer's. . . .

In the depths of the buffalo path leading into the dark jungle, a kudu cow was standing looking straight at us! She was stretching her neck and pricking up her long donkey's ears, very astonished. We did not dare stir a finger, let alone move aside, in case a bull should be behind her. She did not move, but stood there gaping at us with that peculiar hypnotic stare with which a hind appearing suddenly in our home forests can make us catch our breath.

For whole minutes we looked at each other. In front of me the black tracker was standing on his one match stick leg as steadily as though he had never had a second one.

Then something unexpected happened. There was a slight crackling of twigs on one side, and then, practically noiselessly, there thrust itself forward between me and the kudu—the mighty

## *Land of Elephants*

black head of a big bull buffalo! He was not looking at me, nor at the kudu, and he did not move any farther forward; yet the big rough head completely filled the narrow path. . . .

I should have liked to shoot, but being prepared for kudu was holding a lighter rifle, which was not much good for buffalo, and my heavy gun was with one of the men at the back. I dare not turn round, and though I beckoned behind me with one finger, when my heavy rifle was forwarded to me it was too late. The buffalo head withdrew again into the jungle in as ghostly fashion as it had come. And when the coast was clear again, so to speak, there was the kudu cow, still with her Argus eye fixed on me. . . .

Then the wind gave us away. With a terrific crash away they both went, buffalo and kudu cow together, and we never knew whether there had been a bull kudu anywhere near or not.

As it then occurred to me that there were four well grown mountains between me and my camp, I grasped my hiker's stick and set off with a sigh towards home.

\* \* \*

At dawn the next day we were again searching the countryside from the highest peak nearby. This time too our glasses picked up a fine kudu bull a long way away just like yesterday's, on a steep craggy slope. This time there was no forest anywhere near him. He was staring motionless down into the abyss of the opal-coloured lake which the rising sun was just beginning to touch and colour.

## *The Greater Kudu*

After an alpine effort only slightly less exacting than yesterday's, we reached the place from which the kudu had been gazing at Lake Rudolf that morning, but by that time, of course, he was gazing no longer. We did not even find his tracks. And we deliberated whether we should already turn back towards home; we were four hours from camp and the sun was well past its zenith. But then we decided to search that part of the mountain just a little longer; to look at the other side as we had come so far already.

And when after long scrambling from rock to rock I looked out from behind a big silver-grey boulder—there stood the kudu bull before me, not eighty yards away!

I had no time to enjoy the situation, for we saw each other practically at the same time. Back went his head, his long twisted horns flat on his back, and he streaked for the valley.

My sight of him, his first few leaps and the crash of my rifle all happened in a matter of seconds, quicker than I can describe. At my shot the bull gave a great jump, then rushed on for a little, turned a somersault, and crashed down into the gorge with such tremendous velocity that my hair stood on end: "Damn . . . he'll smash those wonderful horns."

With my heart in my mouth I clambered down towards him. When I saw where he was lying I stopped to look through my field-glasses, I was so afraid that something must have happened to the horns. Mercifully they were all right. Though he had stood on his head several times before he

## *Land of Elephants*

reached the bottom of the gorge, only a tiny splinter had been knocked off the very tip of the left horn. It was a miracle they had not been smashed to pieces.

On the way home I positively turned hiker. I climbed those awful mountains whistling cheerfully. All the encouragement I needed was the kudu head carried by the bearer in front of me, my splendid trophy of the king of antelopes.

\* \* \*

That same evening held yet another memorable event in store for me. The shooting of the kudu was not the end of the day.

We had wasted a good deal of time cutting off the kudu's head, photographing and so on, and we were still far from camp when complete darkness came down. Luckily the moon was on our side, otherwise we should easily have lost our way for even our trackers had never been over the country before.

It must have been about eight o'clock, and we were just coming out of the darkness of the forest on to a moonlit clearing, when, with a deep grunt, a solitary bull buffalo leapt up before us, made off, but then stopped, turned round and snorted angrily at us. I sat down and took aim, though I could not possibly see my foresight. I could make out the black form of the buffalo, but darkness completely swallowed up the end of my rifle. But then recklessness seized me, foresight or no foresight, my finger crooked and I let drive. The bullet smacked sharply into the buffalo and after a short run he went down.

That was pure luck. For if had I hit him in the

## *The Greater Kudu*

Wrong place there would not even have been a tree anywhere near for me to make for. To shoot blindly like that at dangerous big game without being able to see what one is shooting at is useless recklessness, unworthy of a hunter. Criminal thoughtlessness. One is almost certain to shoot the beast in the wrong place if one hits it at all. Result: useless torture of the animal, or, as happens more often than not, the wounded beast's well-deserved vengeance. This time, by chance, it succeeded. But such a result cannot under any circumstances justify the action.

I did not want to make us any later by waiting to cut off the buffalo's head; it was already nearly ten o'clock by the time I sat down by the camp-fire to have supper. The kudu head, hung from the branch of a tree, grew and grew as the flickering light from the camp-fire played on it, and our only bottle of champagne opened in celebration added even more to its proportions.

At dawn, again in pouring rain, I went out to collect the horns of the buffalo I had shot the night before. The hyenas had made a thorough mess of its head during the night, having chewed up the greater part of it.

When I got back to camp, all my belongings were already on the camels' backs. This time they suffered the loading willingly, with not a word of protest. They knew that we were starting off down the mountain to their companions waiting in the valley. Their servitude was over. The camel is a clever beast but, for all that, God knows I have no affection for it.

## CHAPTER IX

### PROPITIATORY BREAKFAST

*December, 1933.*

My solitary camp is pitched in the untravelled jungle of the Ukamba region of Kenya. To-day I parted from the friend who till now has been my partner in elephant-hunting. Each of us is to try his luck on his own. Each of us has plunged into the unknown, having agreed that in two weeks' time we should meet in the same place that we parted—at the bottom of a steep hill as landmark.

It was before dawn that my elephant-tracker, who goes by the name of Mukula, slipped into my tent. I was awake, but I pretended to be still asleep, and Mukula began to wake me by whispering, and as I showed no reaction, he repeated, ten times or more, each time a little louder:

“Ondoka, Bwana!” (“Wake up, Master!”)

He was carrying two or three thin sticks, wands about eighteen inches long, the exact measurements of the footprints of the bull elephants whose tracks we found yesterday, sure signs that big tuskers have been hereabouts. We are not interested in tracks of less than a foot and a half; it is not worth bothering with them; I would have nothing to do with tusks under fifty pounds each, and their owners are of large proportions.

## *Propitiatory Breakfast*

But it is still early. The horizon is not yet turning grey, the hyenas are still howling; why this hurry?

I listened patiently to every word of Mukula's long explanation, but did not understand a syllable of it. The old man speaks the Wakamba language, which is like Chinese to me. There is no lack of interpreters, but the trouble is that they all talk at once, and they all translate Mukula's speech differently. They even quarrel over it. I have no liking for such debates at dawn. Trials of patience are nothing for an empty stomach. Finally we do come to an understanding.

Last year there was an unfortunate accident quite close by here. A wounded elephant killed a native hunter, a good friend of Mukula's, Pilipili, who hunted elephants with bow and poisoned arrows.

"We buried him here at the edge of the forest," he tells me, "but if you take some breakfast to him, we shall be able, through him, to revenge his death, and he will help us to kill the big elephant."

"I'll give him all my dinner as well," I replied, "as long as he really takes our side."

"Pilipili doesn't need a great deal," says Mukula, "only a little bit of everything, even a drop of your tea, and to-day you must not have anything for breakfast without giving a little to Pilipili."

It is always as well to comply with the superstitions of the natives, even if they do not invariably bring the luck expected of them. Noncompliance alienates the believers. So I strictly followed the old magician's instructions.



## *Land of Elephants*

At dawn we were all squatting round an ancient tree, at what I was told was the grave of the elephant-hunter. Mukula very carefully cleared away the dry, scorched grass and accumulation of twigs, and "laid" a table on the grave after his own fashion. He plucked two big, shining leaves; those were the dishes. On one of them he put the remains of his own breakfast: a mouthful of meal porridge and a bit of dried zebra meat; on the other he spread my offering: half a sardine, a pinch of sugar, broken biscuits, and poured over the whole thing, the tea we had brought with us in a cup.

But the late lamented Pilipili needs to smoke after breakfast. So Mukula produced the antelope horn which served him as snuff-box, and crowned the porridge with a few chips of snuff. On Mukula's encouragement, I, for my part, put a cigarette and three matches on the grave. I did not leave the box there, though they were safety matches. I fear my sometime colleague may have had a little difficulty in lighting up. Though who knows? Perhaps he does not smoke cigarettes.

Finally Mukula produced a poisoned arrow from his quiver, and stuck that in beside the breakfast.

During the whole procedure he was talking uninterruptedly to the dead man, though what they were talking about will always be a secret to me. I only hope that they were not cursing me for venturing into the hunting-grounds which they had held for thousands of years.

Then, with our minds at rest, and inspired by

### *Propitiatory Breakfast*

the evidence of our own goodwill, we set off hunting.

And it seems that the sardine was not without effect. For not that day, but a few days later, I did shoot a big elephant. It may have been the cigarette. It was a good cigarette.

Oh, my black colleague, resting beneath yonder tree, my thanks for your kind intervention!

## CHAPTER X

### A CHRISTMAS ELEPHANT HUNT

*Ukamba. December 25th, 1933.*

A GREY dawn, with a thick billowing sea of mist. As I came out of my tent I instinctively muffled myself up to the neck, almost waiting for the shivers to run down my back. Oh, if only they would.

The mist is all in vain; it is exhaustingly hot, close weather. The steaming vegetation breathes a nauseous, sickeningly sweet scent. The sweat breaks out on me as I stand, and mixes with the warm fog on my face. The air is like a Turkish bath. There is no keeping cool here by thinking on the frosty Caucasus. This is Africa, here Man sweats. And off comes the coat into which I had snuggled.

We are following the palm-fringed bank of the tortuous, shallow Tiva river, looking for tracks of the elephants which came down to drink in the night.

The undergrowth is sharp-leaved sedge as high as a man, and the elephant paths through it are like man-made footpaths. We hurry along them, quietly, in single file. In front, the two trackers, lean figures armed with bows and arrows and smelling of rancid butter and snuff; behind, my two gunbearers; and last of all a porter, hung

## *A Christmas Elephant Hunt*

about like a Christmas tree with water-bottles, cameras, hatchets and knives, and clinking and clanking his belongings the whole time, though for weeks I have been telling him to keep a little back and not to come rattling along here just at my shoulder obviously frightening everything out of my way. As often as I order him to keep back, he gradually works up again. He has a dislike of being alone.

The wet sedge whips my face, and my clothes are tepidly sopping. The river splashes and bubbles quietly beside us, the general store hung round the porter clanks aggressively. Apart from that, and the sleepy calls of a few waking birds, there is silence. The silence of the wilderness.

The more startling was that hellish shriek that suddenly split the silence. A humanly animal yell of rage. . . .

We stopped with our hearts in our mouths. Even the Christmas tree stopped rattling.

Then a hideous din of barking and yelping and the breaking of branches under heavy bodies: nothing to be seen in that mist, but there is no mistaking the curses of a family of baboons disturbed at their morning ablutions. That sudden yell was the sentinel baboon's alarm.

An old, bad-tempered monkey like that can scare you to death. My pipe even went out. A pipe is a moody instrument. Neglect it for a minute or two, and out it goes.

By the time daylight was full we had come on fresh elephant tracks. Huge feet had made a

## *Land of Elephants*

positive toboggan-slide down the steep, sandy bank; and down below, on the muddy edge of the water, had trampled holes the size of a baby's bath. The elephants had been there only a few hours before; the mud that had spurted on to the shore was still damp, and the torn, trampled leaves had not yet felt the touch of the sun.

But unfortunately these were all tracks of cow elephants, mixed with a few calf spoors. Mother elephants had come here in the night to bath their children, and the old bull keeps away from their noisy, tree-trampling, trumpeting company. So it was no good looking among them for a tusker such as we wanted.

We hurried on along the river. It must have been towards eight o'clock—we have no watch, for it stopped working, so we calculate from the sun—when we came on tracks such as we wanted. A mighty foot had stamped tracks a foot and a half across in the river-bank; a big bull had drunk here and, by the signs, one bearing heavy ivory. When he had scrambled up the steep river-side, he had dug his tusks into the bank again and again, as pairs of round holes on each side of the track showed. "Tusks heavy," say my men.

The trail led out of the thick reeds along the river-bank into the gloomy depths of the jungle. For an elephant to break through the prodigious undergrowth, the stinging-nettles, the age-old confusion of fallen trees with their tangled accumulation of creepers, is easy enough. For the hunter it is less easy. Only very occasionally can

## *A Christmas Elephant Hunt*

he stand up straight. He must bend double, duck hither and thither, sometimes creeping on all fours, sometimes flat on his stomach.

If it were not for the thorns . . .

I think God, at the Creation, must have forgotten to think of future elephant-hunters. Otherwise I cannot believe he would have permitted this riot of thorniness. Here even the grass is thorned.

I would not mind if they were normal, straight thorns, for then, even if they did prick—after all, that is what thorns are for—when they had finished they would withdraw and let me pass on my way. But that is not how the African thorn works. For you will not ever, by any chance, find a straight thorn among them. Their favourite shapes are the button-hook, the crotchet-hook, the cat or lion's claw, the half-moon, and the sickle. And as they grow in vast quantities on every tree, flower, and thicket of any proportion, they constitute a perpetual distraction for the elephant-hunter. A plant in the Kitui jungle which did not feel like producing a crop of hooked thorns, simply would not stay there long; the others would drive it out.

These thorns are carnivorous. They are perpetually lurking, filled with perverse and evil cravings, to grab from the tactical base of their branches at the hunter who would pass through them, each striving to bear off a bit of his skin or at least a little souvenir from his trousers. Oh, ye mild acacia, wild rose and blackberry thorns! It is as well you cannot see the example of these

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others, or even you might turn hooked in envious imitation!

So much for the thorns. But I was obliged to devote so much space to them, because for five long hours nothing happened to me but thorn-grabs.

Every now and again, however, our hearts were gladdened by the finding of certain natural evidences on the elephant track, from the measurements of which the size of the animal can be deduced. The trackers then stop, take off their sandals and jab their big toes into the "find," discovering from whether it is cold or warm or hot, with astonishing accuracy, how long ago the elephant passed.

As I say, usually they use their big toes as thermometers, but there are some of them, particularly conscientious—my tracker is one such—who have not excessive confidence in their toes, and for certainty's sake try it with their thumb as well. A pedantic tracker tries with both.

We had been torn and scratched by the thorns for four solid hours, when at last the temperature began to go up. "Moto" (hot) declared the seers, and at once began to strip, which is a sure sign of getting close to the elephant.

That they stripped is not to be taken literally, for they do not have very much to take off; it only means that they get rid of everything superficial. They take off their sandals, bows, quivers and skin-bags containing their magic, their snuff-pouches, even their food; they roll their leather loin-cloths, which reach down to their knees, up

## *A Christmas Elephant Hunt*

to their middles—and they are ready for the struggle.

Even this unnecessary loss of time puts a strain on the hunter's patience, though the real thing is yet to follow: "binding the elephant."

According to the natives, this settles the issue of the hunt. The Kirongozi squat down beside the track, in their hands the double "dava ya tembo" (elephant magic). They keep the two magics in little cases made of horn or ivory: in the one a brown, and in the other a red powder.

With the brown one, which is prepared from the bark of six kinds of tree and from the secretions of the gland to be found behind an elephant's ear, they anoint everybody's eyelids, mine included. This so improves our sight as to make quite sure that we shall see the elephant before he sees us!

The red powder, for its part, regulates the course of the sun. They pluck a blade of grass, and, having all solemnly spat on its tip, they anoint it with the red powder. Then they raise the red-tipped grass-blade to the heavens, and with it assign a limit to the sun. He may only proceed as far as the point indicated and there must wait until we have killed the elephant! Finally they strew a little of each powder on the spoor, and trace queer squiggly signs round it with their forefingers. And the whole time their tongues are going in an incomprehensible language, their voices a soft, throaty falsetto. When they have finished their prayer they put a knot of grass on the elephant's path. With that they symbolise



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the "binding" of the elephant. Now he cannot escape; he must wait for us.

This lengthy jugglery, of course, only gives the elephant opportunity to get farther ahead again. By the time we have finished we were exactly where we were an hour before. We must start the pursuit again.

When we have patiently complied with the regulations we can set off once more. The elephant meanwhile has made good progress. We have obviously been left sadly behind, for all his having been "bound."

I do not know how long we hurried after him; the sun had long passed the red powder's limit, and I was cursing the Kirongozi aloud for having so magic-ed the elephant away. Cursing them in my own language. But suddenly they stopped the rising flood of words. They had checked. Like pointing hounds . . .

They could hear the elephant.

They signed to me, asking whether I could hear it too. But my ears are no match for theirs. Minutes passed before I caught the sound. A distant, soft rumble. The rumble of the elephant's stomach.

That is the most exciting moment—when suddenly crisis is upon one. At such times it is as though everything stopped for a second. Even breathing. The world stops turning.

Then I am seized with buck-fever. It sets even my teeth chattering. Later when it comes to shooting that phase has passed.

The grunting and grumbling still coming from

## *A Christmas Elephant Hunt*

the same spot shows that the elephant has had enough of moving about by now, and has turned lazy in the heat; has stopped in a shady patch for a noonday rest. To digest in peace.

Only three of us slither closer towards him. First one of the Kirongozi, then myself, and then my gunbearer. We crawl slowly nearer, carefully putting aside every branch and every dry twig across our path, our knees and hands turned to pincushions for the thorns, though we have no feeling for such things.

The Kirongozi in front of me raises his hand and drips a little dust out of it to test the wind. It is often apt to shift in the afternoon. If it should blow our scent towards the elephant we might as well turn home, for he would be off like a shot. That is if he did not come straight for us, which is also not to be desired.

I am so close that I can distinctly hear every single hissing breath. At the most there are ten paces between me and that monstrous bulk, and still I can not see a square inch of it, this accursed undergrowth is so thick.

The Kirongozi will go no nearer. I am not surprised. Naked and unarmed I would not have dared to go even so far, with whatever magic I had "bound" the beast. Silently, supplely, like some black snake, the Kirongozi slithers back past me, while with pursed lips he indicates that there, farther on, is the elephant.

Flat on my stomach I try the wind once more; the dust slipping out from my fingers still drifts back towards me. All's well.

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Then come the last yards. As I measured afterwards, I was seven yards off when the shape of that gigantic body appeared through the gloom of the jungle. I could tell it was the elephant, but whether it was standing tail on or head on or sideways, I had not the faintest idea. And of its tusks I could not even see a gleam. . . .

As I lay there, anguishedly calming my nerves, the wind changed!

“Now . . .”

And the forest crashes to life. That grey mountain whirls into movement, out spread the enormous ears, and there’s a crackling and crashing as though the whole jungle were on the move. . . .

Then two long, gleaming, bayonet-like tusks, and between them the high-stretched, snaky trunk . . . His chest looming black above me . . . a heavy express bullet from my right barrel straight into it . . . the monster wheels . . . the left barrel in the ribs . . .

Smell of gunpowder; eyes weeping from the kick of the heavy gun; a fearful crash and trampling. He breaks the jungle before him like an armoured tank gone mad. . . .

A dull crash. Silence.

When I eventually clambered over and through the confusion of broken trees between us, there he lay before me, dead.

When the excitement was over we paced out the distance. I had shot from five yards. After the shot the elephant had not gone more than thirty yards.

\* \* \*

## *A Christmas Elephant Hunt*

Night had woven her veil complete when we caught sight at last of our camp-fire. The stars were lighting up with their tropical, startling quickness. Candles on the sky's Christmas tree.

To-day, I believe, is Christmas Day—at home. At least, the calendar says so. It is hard for me to believe it. This stifling night, the high song of the mosquitoes, the mixture of scents from the wanton luxuriance of malarial jungle, heavy with dark evidence of putrefaction, are no encouragement to think of snowy fields and pine trees and shepherds. Here it is Christmas only in so far as my thoughts fly more and more home-wards, and thoughts from home flutter more closely round me.

A mutual visit. A visit so complete that I can positively feel the smell of the Christmas tree, and all the Christmases of my childhood—for we only think of those—pass before me. So close that if they were birds I should hear the beat of their wings.

But later, when we are smoking beside the fire, after supper, my strayed thoughts return, called back by the fresh remembrance of to-day's hunt.

The camp-fire is an excellent hunting-ground. In its restful, flickering light, we go through the whole of to-day's elephant hunt again. Comfortably, without exhaustion, without excitement, without thorns, till finally, still peacefully smoking, we shoot him again. Luckily the unfortunate elephant need not repeat the whole process.

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This camp-fire reconstruction, this mental cud-chewing, is always the end of red-letter hunting days. However exhausted we come back, we always go through the camp-fire hunt.

Incidentally, this kind of mental ruminating has great advantages. At every re-chew the remembrances taste better than ever.

## CHAPTER XI

### TERMITES

*Kitui. December, 1933.*

NIGHT has come down on elephant land. There is silence over my camp, my good niggers have retired to rest, the camp-fire has sunk to ashes; there is nothing but the flickering of my oil-lamp and the scratch of the pencil in my diary.

The voice of the night, too, is heard only in the form of a few hollow-voiced frogs hooting down in the swamp close by, hooting till one would take them for owls; frogs here don't know how to croak, they would never even make themselves understood by our home frogs.

A quantity of glow-worms are sailing hither and thither and up and down, a confusion of wavering, greenish little lamps. They are much bigger and brighter than our glow-worms. They produce a positive fireworks display, switching on and off again and again the little electric bulbs attached to their abdomens. Two of them came and rested here on the corner of my table; one of them still flickered away while he perched, sending out light signals like a sort of code—love-messages to his mate, I suppose.

A swarm of winged termites flutters ghostily into my circle of lamp-light. They are on their honeymoon flight. They have never seen the light till

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now, but have lived huddled in the dark recesses of their underground fortress, waiting for years for this day.

Once in their lives the gate of life is opened to them, and once only they take to the wing. And then they have scarcely been flying half an hour when the whirl of their little carnival is ended. The unpractised flyers weaken, drop to the ground, break off their wings, and then wait, defenceless and resigned, for death. The climax of their whole two years of life is over in a few short minutes. For two years they languish in the dungeon of the termite castle, finally to come forth and fulfil their destiny in half an hour: to fly, love, and die.

The termite has whitely gleaming, transparent wings, something like a little dragon-fly's; but its body is no bigger than a fly's. When the swarm settles, in ten minutes every wing is amputated; the earth gleams with the thousands of little wings as though it were sprinkled with slivers of glass. And on that gleaming pile the thousands of maimed insects writhe and crawl helplessly. A hecatomb of suicidal lovers.

And why? What is the object of this furious death orgy? Why wings, if they are only for flying to death?

To these, as to a good many other questions concerning the termites, we wait in vain for an answer. Science knows a great deal about the termites, and a positive library full of books has been written about them and their "intelligence." The oldest scientific work we have dealing with the termites dates from the beginning of the

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eighteenth century; since then we have learnt a good deal about them, but there is much more that has remained secret. The "ant-hills" which appear at every step in the tropics, are even nowadays spacious lands of adventure for our imaginations and are still strongholds of great mysteries.

From outside, the termite erections seem bare and unpretending heaps of earth with no sign of life about them. No one would believe that a completely established state organisation, astonishingly equipped, of the "most civilised insect in the world," is in possession of its interior.

Quite often termite hills are to be found in strange shapes, reminiscent of pillars, fortress ruins, giant mushrooms, fantastic coral islands; but they are a matter of chance, for their builders pay no attention to the outer appearance of their palaces. They could not if they would, for they would never see them, being blind, poor things, building from inside in eternal darkness. The only important thing to them is the interior. But that very much so.

Before I come to this interior arrangement, I must add a few remarks about how they look outside. Termite castles are found as high as fifteen or twenty feet; that is, compared with the size of the builders' bodies, a human-built house some 40,000 feet high. The termites from time immemorial have outdone the New York skyscrapers, which in the eyes of any self-respecting termite would seem mean and paltry construc-



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tions. The termite heap is so solidly built that it will stand up to the weight of an elephant leaning against it to scratch himself, and it is so hard that it can only be split with pickaxes or dynamite, though it is made of a very everyday material—the excrement of its inhabitants. Termite compost. Cheap and inexhaustible.

I have never yet had the luck to look into the depths of a termite hill, so I cannot speak from my own experience of the wonders to be found there. My information is mostly gathered from the works of my former teacher, the world-famous investigator of ant and termite life, the German Escherich, whose lectures I once used to attend at the University of Munich. (Behold, I did not attend the University of Munich for nothing!)

I know from Escherich that the interior of the termite hill has a constant temperature in winter and summer, regulated by a brilliantly constructed “conditioned air supply,” that the royal couple live in a separate throne apartment, the soldiers in separate barracks, the workers in separate tenements, the adolescent winged termites in separate nurseries. That there are in it hatching-rooms, store-rooms, cemeteries, mushroom-gardens, and fattening-pens. That at the entrances to the ventilation shafts of the termite stronghold armed soldiers are posted, who at the approach of danger sound the alarm, and that a police force constantly controls the traffic inside.

Even so much is a fine enough accomplishment in the insect world, and if we think that termite civilisation dates from time immemorial, and so is

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in any case much older than our own, it is, perhaps, worth while stopping for a minute or two before this unpretentious-looking but all the more remarkable insect fortress. And as unfortunately we cannot see inside let us try to picture with our mind's eye what happens there.

But do not think too much about it. We cannot understand them anyhow. "Nur nicht denken mit dem dummen Kopf," a famous man has said, and let us comfort ourselves with the saying of another famous man: "Intelligence is the means by which we can understand that in the long run everything is incomprehensible." So why waste effort?

But as I have already begun, I had better write down everything I have heard about the termites.

According to investigators the citizens of the termite state belong to five separate classes: workers, soldiers, police, the winged aristocracy and the royal couple. I mention them in this seemingly reverse order, because that is how they follow each other in importance.

The most important part is played by the workers. They are the most numerous, and, as we shall see, on their shoulders—if they have got any—rests the well-being of the whole society; and they have power of life and death. But the workers are sexless, weaponless, wingless, and quite blind; they are a defenceless prey to their hordes of enemies, amongst which the fear-fullest, savagest, and most bloodthirsty is—the ant.

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Between the ants and the termites, there is, and always has been a raging struggle which will never know a truce, a war which can be said to have created and refined the intelligence of both insect races, which, in the course of time has led by force of necessity to the highest development of the termites as social insects—an endless, mutually destructive, mutually beneficial hate, unexampled in their world.

They say—again I mean the scientists—that if there were no ants, the termites would long ago have devoured the world; and on the other hand if it had not been for the ants I should think the termites would never have reached such a state of perfection, for civilisation only develops under pressure of necessity. In our own case, if we had not harried each other and striven to outdo each other, our little cares would have been stronger than the civilising urge, and we should still have been gnawing at bones in caves and paying no attention to anything but our stomachs. In any case we should have been living very differently from our present state. And to what should we have developed, what perfection should we have achieved if we could boast of such enemies as the termites have? Eternal, eternally invincible, and, what is most important, an enemy of a different race! The termites have been struggling with the ants for ever and ever, but we have only had to try our strength with our own kind. Where should we be now if we had had to encounter a lot of seven-headed, horse-legged Martians every day?

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But we were dealing with the functions of the workers in the termite fortress. They do everything and anything that turns up. They are never idle. Their most important function is digestion. The working-class is the stomach of the termite state; only the workers can eat of their own accord, and only the workers can digest, and when they have digested they feed all their termite colleagues who are incapable of this function—the stomachless soldiers, the police, the winged termites, and the royal couple. Whom the workers do not feed, must inevitably die. So the workers regulate the population, and, more than that, the numbers of the several classes of society; for from the larvæ, which emerge from the eggs, they produce at will, in some undiscoverable way—probably by regulation of their food—workers, soldiers, winged termites, or when occasion demands, a king or queen.

If there are too few soldiers, they produce more soldiers, and stop feeding the surplus police so that they die of hunger. But those that die are not a dead loss, since they contribute to the community kitchen. The others eat them. They put their dead, chewed into small pieces, into a mortuary kept for this purpose, which besides being a cemetery is a store-room, for if all else fails they produce supper from there, from the mortal remains of their forbears.

Further, the workers must see to the building of the fortress, to its cleaning and restoration. Their building materials, as I have mentioned before, are also produced from their stomachs:

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sometimes they use it to build with and sometimes to feed the others with.

To the working-class also fall all the usual duties of state administration: care of the royal couple, removal of the eggs from the royal apartment to the hatching cells, administration of the storehouse, care of the mushroom-gardens and fattening-pens, construction of earthworks in case of war, removal of dead and wounded, communications, etc.

They keep their mushroom-gardens separate; the fundamentals of their methods of cultivation are still unknown, we only know that the mushrooms serve as supplementary food supplies. This too, is the function of the "fattening-pen"; shut in there are termite larvæ deprived of their legs and, therefore, incapable of movement and all the more capable of fattening; the workers feed them intensively, so that in case of need they may provide a good fat joint for the community.

This all points to the fact that the working-class is the cream of the termite organisation: they are at once state digesters, cooks, nurses, executioners, architects, gardeners, undertakers, impartial arbiters of life and death.

Now for the soldier class. The soldiers are also sexless, wingless and blind. But they bear on their heads a fearful and disproportionate weapon, a pair of scissor-claws like a lobster's, with which in battle they keep up an unceasing snapping, slaughtering blindly into the eternal darkness before them. They too cannot eat, all the less so on account of their clumsy great helmets,

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and they too are dependent on the will of the workers.

The termites' eternal enemies, the ants, try to force their way into the termite fortress through the ventilation shafts. On these entrances a guard is always mounted, which, when the enemy makes his appearance, sounds an alarm with a sort of hissing noise, whereupon soldiers rush to the scene from the nearest barracks.

Then a fearful struggle ensues, and according to the investigators the ants are the more often the victors. If the battle is indecisive both sides retreat in good order from the battle-field. The ants take with them their booty: the corpses of the enemy. The termite regiments return to their barracks and only the usual guard remains at the entrance. Immediately after that squads of workers arrive to repair the earthworks breached in the struggle.

If on the other hand the termites find themselves getting the worst of it, they organise a strategic retreat. Squads of workers rush to the spot, build with amazing rapidity "bomb-proof" protective walls behind the fighters, whose line of retreat is then cut off, and who are delivered over inescapably to the enemy, sacrificed on the altar of patriotism; but the ants' attack is checked, the State is saved. Every day in the termite fortresses such Thermopylæ are fought. The Leonidasæ are innumerable and unsung.

In the termite heaps there may quite often be found parts occupied by ants, the two deadly enemies living apparently in the greatest amity

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and peace. But only apparently. For the ants are not invited guests; they have wrested their home with violence and bloody strife from the termites, who have only given up that part of their possessions under pressure of superior strength, and have then walled themselves up in the remoter depths of their catacombs.

The termite police are nothing more than somewhat stunted soldiers, and are supposed not to take any active part in fighting, but to be concerned only with internal order and superintending the workers.

The next class are the winged termites. These have been most gallantly equipped by nature; they have not only wings and eyes, but they most decidedly boast of sex. Boys and girls are brought up in a common cell, fed on what their assiduous workers digest for them. The winged termites are the perpetuators of the thread of life, the hope of the future; it is they who are to carry on the conception of the republic, perpetuate the struggle; they receive the carefulest attention, to them might every termite look up with pride—if the poor things could look.

The only function of the winged termites is the propagation of the breed. At first glance the winged termites seem to be the only class worth belonging to. But do not waste envy on them. For their lot is, perhaps, even bitterer than that of the others. In actual bitterness there cannot be very much difference since their source of material supplies is the same—the workers' stomachs.

The winged termites, as I said at the beginning,

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pay dearly for that half-hour of bliss which fate deals out to them so niggardly. The payment for it is their life. For two years they wait for the great day. Finally, when the rains are close at hand, the hour of freedom strikes. At some mysterious signal from an unknown commander the soldier guards stand back from the ventilating shafts, the ceremonial doors open, and the happy, fatal wedding swarm floods out.

I have several times had the opportunity of watching that amazing exodus. Those countless, gleaming, membrane-like wings look like a spouting geyser as the millions of insect lovers first see the light of the sun and soar drunk with pleasure skywards.

At the moment they leave the fortress they plunge into the jaws of death. All kinds of preying insects, especially the ants, seem to be warned in time of the coming wedding-flight of the termites and are lying in wait for the lovers on the very threshold of the opening doors.

A large part of the defenceless, soft-bodied termites finishes here, before they have even stretched their wings. Those who escape with their lives, struggling over their slaughtered companions' writhing bodies, fly straight upwards. But at the sight of the gleaming swarms birds of all sizes arrive to feast on the blissfully fluttering insects. I have seen birds perched, panting and gaping, on a tree, gorged on the easy food of swarming termites till they were positively ill.

Quite soon the silver cloud of wings descends.



## *Land of Elephants*

As the couples reach the ground they immediately set about breaking off their wings, and in a few moments there is nothing left of those proud little moths but a writhing mass of grubs. They have had their pleasure, now their only thought is their duty, and for that there is no need for wings, so off with them.

And then, as the couples set about the foundation of a new family, the final catastrophe descends on them.

Swarms of ants appear, sharp-toothed, blood-thirsty multitudes which fling themselves on the completely defenceless termites who can no longer even use their only means of escape, their wings. And to the ants are soon added scores of other kinds of insects, and, if he should notice, even Man appears too, in the shape of a few hungry niggers who gather the termites into baskets, take them home, roast them, and consume them as a somewhat doubtful delicacy.

And the propagation of the race, one asks with some justification, what happens to it if they all die?

Not quite all. Of the millions there are perhaps two couples, perhaps three, perhaps four—how should I know how many, but very few indeed—who come through the many fearful dangers, who escape alive, and at the price of their brethren's destruction begin a new life. Millennial experience saved for a new generation. A fresh link in the chain. A fresh termite hill. . . .

Finally, a few words about the unhappy, most privileged couple of the termite fortress, the most

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miserable and the most helpless of termites, the royal pair. The Queen in no sense of the word deserves the name. But science calls her that, so I will grant it her. Though the poor Queen is nothing more than an enormously bloated, imprisoned egg-laying machine, bearing no resemblance even to the shape of a termite. She can never leave her royal cell, could never even squeeze out of it, cannot even move. The Queen is about ten to fifteen thousand times bigger than her workers. The workers can, of course, go freely in and out of the royal cell, which they enlarge in accordance with the proportions of the imperial belly.

I am not exaggerating when I degrade this unhappy insect called Queen to the rank of egg-laying machine, for according to Escherich's investigations she lays an egg on an average once every second, that is 12,000 a day, and about 26,000,000 a year. As far as one knows this wretched outcast lays day and night and—also as far as one knows—lives for three or four years. And when she eventually becomes tired of laying 26,000,000 a year and, I suppose, tries to "get away" with four or five millions less she is immediately sentenced: starvation to death and removal to the store-rooms.

No one is responsible for her death, no one kills her, she simply does not get any more food. The great unknown, the Anonymus who directs the termite fortress condemns her to death. There is in the Congo a native tribe which simply poisons its chief as soon as he begins to grow old.

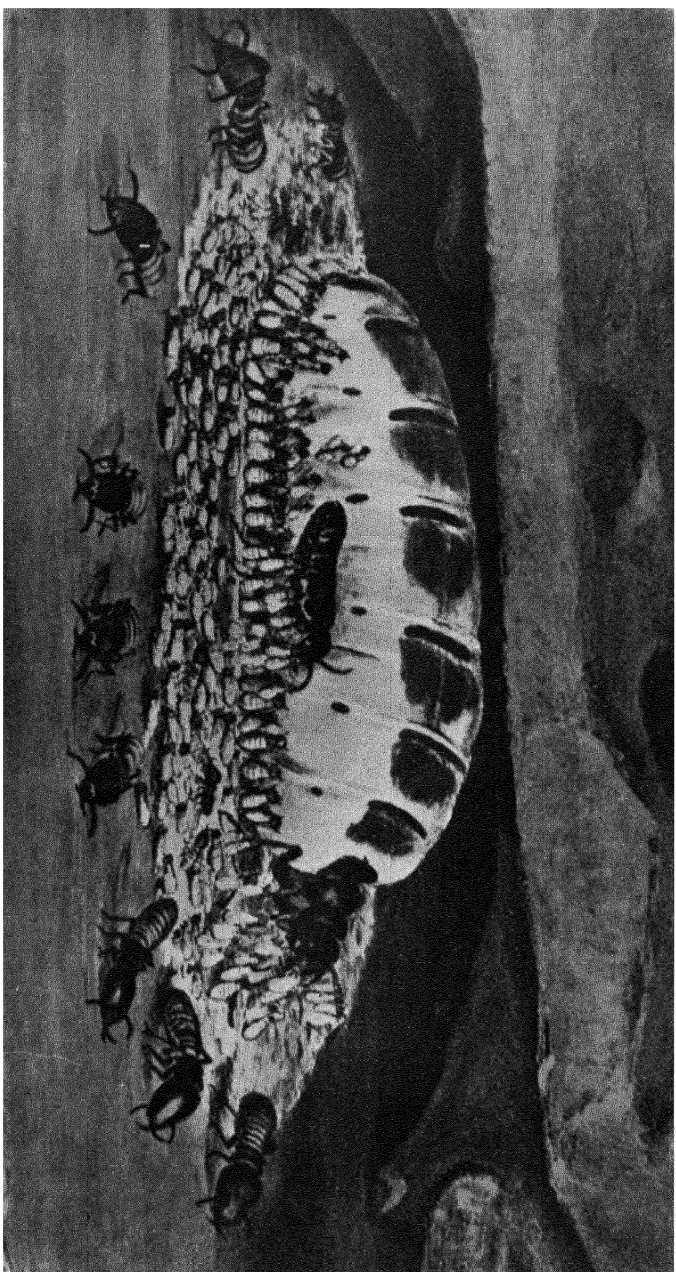
## *Land of Elephants*

There, too, nobody is responsible for the chief's death. The people, the "public interest" does away with him.

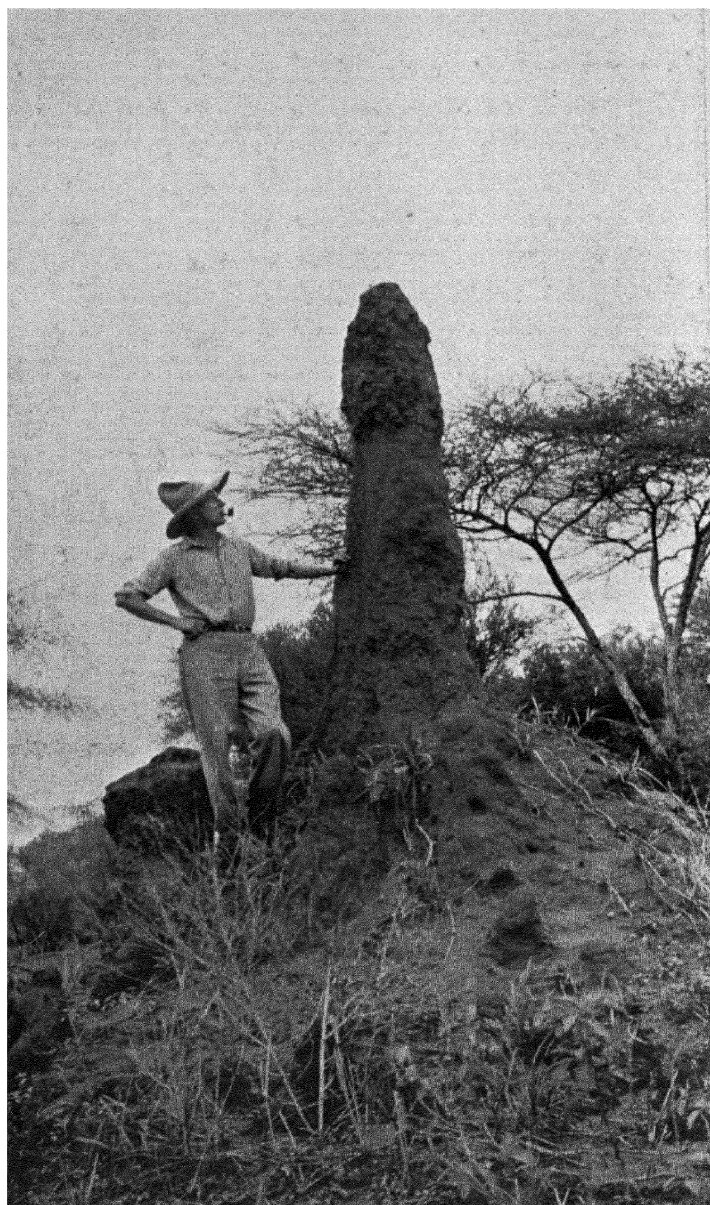
The Queen's partner who equally unworthily bears the name of King, is a humble, shrinking little henpeck. He lives with his wife, who is about two hundred times bigger than he is, and he is full of inhibitions and inferiority complexes, always crouching beneath the whale-like belly of his spouse.

The picture on the opposite page, which I have taken from Escherich's work, gives a clear enough idea of the interior of the royal cell. The fat, bloated, sausage-like bulk is the Queen, and clinging to her side is her wretched husband. The little insects swarming round the Queen are the workers, part of them bringing sustenance for her, those clustering round her stern being occupied with the removal of the eggs appearing every second. The workers busy underneath the Queen's abdomen are constantly cleaning, stroking, fondling the immovable egg-machine to encourage its better functioning. The semicircle of big-clawed insects in front of the workers are the soldiers, waiting for any enemy who may approach.

The termites equipped with digestion, that is the workers, live on a vegetarian diet. To keep up supplies they frequently have to leave their fortresses and make foraging expeditions of various lengths. As they cannot bear the light, they set off at night and connect their home with the plant or tree-trunk on which they are working



The Queen Termite



Termite Hill

## *Termites*

by covered galleries and concealed subways, so that they can continue their transport of supplies under cover. These tube-like subways are enormously well-planned. Some of them are double, with two-way traffic, outgoing traffic only on one side and returning on the other. And there are some which are single-track, but in these, at intervals, there are broader "sidings," like those on our narrow mountain roads at home. If two loaded workers meet there is no room for them to pass side by side in the narrow passage, so one of them retreats to a siding, waits until the other has gone by, and then continues on his way. On these foraging expeditions the termites destroy practically everything they come across, nothing escaping them but iron, stone and cement. For fear of them we here keep our garments in tin trunks, for if the termites found them they would chew to destruction any clothes stored in a wooden trunk. Hereabouts the bottom part of telegraph poles and of fence uprights are made of iron or cement so that the termites cannot destroy them. The sleepers of the Uganda railway are also made of iron, because if they were of wood the termites would have derailed the train in no time.

Quite often termites consume buildings, especially settlers' houses. They drive their tunnels into the house in the cunningest of fashions which would put any house-breaker to shame, generally without the inhabitants being in the slightest degree aware of it. By the time they do discover it, it is too late and the termites have

## *Land of Elephants*

consumed the side of the cupboard towards the wall.

One hears of such things as these over and over again: Somebody comes back to his uninhabited house after a considerable absence. When he goes in he does not notice anything suspicious, but the arm-chair in which he sits simply collapses beneath him, because the termites have excavated the interior of the chair's legs. Picture-frames, which are apparently untouched and still hanging comfortably on the wall, suddenly go to pieces. The termites have removed the interior of the frames, gone off home with it long ago and tucked it away in the store-rooms of their distant fortress.

These are everyday occurrences. But I can produce more extraordinary ones. In India, in 1814, the palace of the Governor at Calcutta had to be pulled down because the termites had created such havoc that it threatened to collapse entirely. Jamestown, the capital of the island of St. Helena, was almost completely destroyed by them. The ravages of the termites could only be checked by the importation of innumerable swarms of ants.

\* \* \*

People consider unfamiliar manifestations of nature generally in two ways. Some are all amazement, think them over a good deal, but cannot understand them. And some are not amazed, take the facts for granted and understand even less. For the first kind the world is nothing but

## *Termites*

mystery, problems, wonders, and secrets. For the latter everything is "natural," they can reconcile themselves to everything they experience about them, silencing their doubts with consolatory phrases about "the natural order," and "cause and effect."

But there is nothing more wonderful or less wonderful in nature. The termite mushrooms-cultivation is not a whit more wonderful than—what shall I say on the spur of the moment?—say the works of our own guts, but it never occurs to us to be consumed with wonder for the latter, because we are used to them. It is only when our eyes light by chance on the unknown flower, or a wild animal, and our minds stray into their unsuspected mode of living that we cry out in wonder, and leave our mouths agape. Then, as though we had found a new chink, a new key-hole in the impenetrable barricade of the Great Unknown, our childish eyes grow wide with wonder and vertigo seizes us at the glimpse of the unplumbed depths of which our imperfect minds can only become aware for a moment at a time, and can never really understand.

As a result of our investigations into the life of the termites, there emerges one great question mark: Who gives orders in the termite fortress? Who disposes? Who is the director? Who is that Anonymus that decides how many soldiers shall be produced, when the Queen shall be starved to death, when the gates shall be opened for the wedding flight? Who plans it all? Who sees into the future? Who leads in battle? Who assigns to



## *Land of Elephants*

these or those workers that they should build earthworks with their digested suppers or feed some big-clawed soldier instead?

In any case not that unhappy couple mockingly styled "royal."

It is interesting that those few who see, who have eyes—the royal couple and the winged termites—are the most wretched and the most helpless. The termite fortress is a kingdom of the blind. An ideal communism of blindness: of the blind workers, who are at once unrestricted lords and eternal slaves of the community. And where do they get their orders from? Why do they display that astonishing strength, that inexplicable community of action and the Spartan discipline in which they are held in a grip of iron? Who is the prodigal magician who can demand of these over-thrifty, over-disciplined, miserly termites the colossal waste of life and squandering of effort, when it is beyond all doubt that only one or two of the swarming millions can escape alive?

\* \* \*

It is past midnight. I have obviously forgotten to go to bed, the termites having made me forget to be sleepy. Entomology is no subject for late evenings.

As I am getting undressed another swarm appears round my lamp. They flutter noiselessly round and round me like tiny white-winged ghosts. I wonder if they know when the ball will be over, and that quite soon they must sink to the ground. And I wonder which of all these many is the chosen

## *Termites*

one, which of them will live through their cata-basis, which will hand on the termite codex to posterity?

I could go on putting such questions for ever.

But the jungle is stubbornly silent. . . .

## CHAPTER XII

### BUFFALO

*Embu. December 30th, 1933.*

MY cock crows just about every five minutes, though there is not a sign of dawn.

He is a remarkably patient bird; he begins announcing the dawn at three in the morning, though here on the Equator the stars never go out until five at least. If he keeps on with this performance he will soon be for the pot, though that is not why I take him with me. I have got some ten hens as well which I kill one by one as need arises, and I only keep the cock for the delectation of these unfortunate victims.

An infernally lusty beast. The moment I doze off again he lets out another shriek, agitating himself the while so violently that he nearly comes in through the tent roof. That is his favourite night perch. It inspires him with thoughts of being a weathercock.

At last after a deal of fruitless crowing he succeeds in summoning the dawn. And he is as proud and pleased up there on the top of the tent-pole, as though the coming of the light were due to his indefatigable demands alone. "Now you see," says he in poultry language, "it's come after all. If it hadn't been for me you might have waited hours for it."

## *Buffalo*

“You’re for the pot, for all that.”

Laggard though it was at the beginning, the dawn moves all the more quickly afterwards. One after another the hills appear out of the gloom, rising behind one another in a fantastic great amphitheatre, flooded with all the nuances of colour from the green nearby to the grey of the distance.

I must head up there to the distant, grey hill-top; for there the whole country is spread out before one, and all the animals for five miles round. I was sitting up there yesterday evening looking for buffalo, but there were none to be seen.

One can get up there in an hour and a half, walking briskly. The country is open, grassy plain-land, with only here and there stunted bushes, and those not big enough to interrupt the view. One can see in every direction. To-day the morning was especially clear and cloudless, and Mount Kenya gleaming in the dawn-flush looks as near as if it would be child’s play to climb. Though it is at least ninety miles from here, and well over 15,000 feet high.

Not much game to be seen on the way. A herd of zebra showed up black on the hill-side; the striped beasts quite colourless with the sun rising behind them. Their leaders neighed to one another, short, barking neighs, probably checking over the numbers to make sure none of the herd was missing. A prowling lion might have levied toll on the beautiful striped troop during the night.

## *Land of Elephants*

Ah, and look! What can have happened to that slowly limping, tottering zebra left behind there?

I could not see clearly because of the glare of the sun in my field-glasses, and it was only when it hobbled along much farther that I noticed a great gaping, bloody wound across its rump, a fearful token of a lion's missed spring.

The anguished beast lay down. It must have been my approach that had roused it, and that must have been what the whinneying of the herd's leaders was about.

I crept cautiously nearer and with one bullet put an end to the poor beast's agonies. It had escaped from the lion's claws, but it was so fearfully mauled that it could never possibly have recovered.

This is an everyday tragedy in lion country. Only unfortunately there is not every day a merciful bullet to help the wounded beast into the other world when it has nothing but a long and torturing death before it.

By the time I reached the hill-top the sun was pouring down its rays with its usual fearsome and dazzling zeal. The light slides along the thick network of spiders' webs on the hill-slopes till the dewy carpet sparkles as though it were of hoarfrost.

I settled down comfortably, took up my field-glasses and carefully examined the country sprawled round me. I had to divide the view into sectors and examine each sector separately.

And when I turned all round I saw a multitude

## *Buffalo*

of animals so vast that it was as though they had assembled from the ends of the earth here below my hill. Grazing herds of all kinds of antelopes and gazelles and troops of zebra many hundreds strong, and towering up just below me a positive forest of giraffes. Forty-two of them. Those patches of black moving here and there—cock-ostriches. On the farther hill a whole troop of grubbing wart-hogs. And those grey craggy-looking shapes here and there—eight rhinos.

I was in my private box, the solitary, exclusive spectator at a gala dawn performance on that paradisaical stage. The unwanted disturber of their innocence and peace. A man-beast of prey.

But the best was yet to come. Over on the edge of the forest, blue in the distance, were the black shapes of animals; from where I was, scarcely bigger than beetles—a big herd of buffalo.

I am a hunter; I am not racked with sobs at the sight of dead or dying beasts; I do not make a wry face when a wounded hare screams in its anguish. But when I dropped down from my free box at that spectacle with the intention of making war on that buffalo herd, it was almost against my will. Was it right to break the perfect peace of that dawn parade with the bang of a gun? To defile it with the smell of blood?

Either a hunter or a Hindoo. (You must know that a Hindoo will let a bug escape from between his fingers in case in his next existence he must be a bug.) Personally I can resist almost

## *Land of Elephants*

everything—except temptation. And—I am not a Hindoo. So off I started towards the buffaloes.

They were grazing on a big slope covered with brushwood and stunted trees; there must have been about a hundred and fifty of them; bulls, cows and calves. The great black herd filled the whole hill-side. They were moving in deep grass up to their bellies, and under cover of that I set to stalking them.

They were grazing away from me. The four or five nearest to me looked to be old bulls; I wanted to have a shot at that rearguard, first with my camera and then with my rifle.

The wind was favourable, the high grass helped, and it was not long before I heard the typical grunting and snuffling of buffaloes before me.

Cautiously I raised my head.

Scarcely a stone's throw from me were the big black backs of three buffaloes, their tufted tails swishing and slapping at the flies. That must be the rear-guard.

Only their grazing heads, the mighty horns seen so far by nothing better than my imagination, were down in the high grass, out of sight.

As I was twisting and gazing and peering—camera in one hand, rifle in the other—there came the dreaded puff of air at the back of my neck which every hunter knows, the Judas kiss of the shifted wind.

Spotted me! Down I went into the grass, seeing nothing but knowing what followed. I knew the

## *Buffalo*

buffaloes had noticed me, and in a moment they would either make off or—make a closer examination. . . .

But hearing nothing I very cautiously looked up. . . .

Twenty-odd massive, mighty-horned heads were staring towards me, with more and more such heads appearing from behind and between them with ghostly silence and suddenness. . . .

They saw me—they were coming. The camera clicked, and then I hastily shot the nearest bull full in the chest. He went down on his knees with a fearful rattle in his throat—was up again—another bullet and he was down for ever.

The others checked. Again my rifle banged. The second bull dropped, shot through the throat. That was too much for the rest; they whirled round and made off.

As they turned I succeeded in hitting yet another fine bull, but the rush of his companions hustled him with them. With a thunderous din and in a cloud of dust the whole herd disappeared down a gully.

Up I ran after them on to the hill-side, saw the fleeing mass still within range but massed so closely together and setting up such a dust that I could not possibly get another shot at the wounded one.

Then one lagged behind. He stopped, turned, stamped and pawed the ground; then his head slowly sank—clearly the one I had shot as the herd turned. I ran towards him, he saw me, jerked up his head, summoned up fresh strength and came



## *Land of Elephants*

straight for me—and two quick bullets in his chest put an end to him.

By then the herd was galloping down the valley out of range, the earth shaking under them like an iron bridge under an express train, and sending up such a smoke that I could only see the leading animal, while the others were swallowed in the mighty dust screen they put up.

I had never before shot three buffaloes out of one herd, least of all four. For as I came back from examining the third buffalo to the first two, to my great surprise I found myself face to face with yet another one, a finer bull than ever. Why this one had separated from the herd I do not know, though it seemed to have stayed behind to help the wounded ones. Him too I served with a "double," letting him have it first with the camera and then with my gun. So in a matter of moments, in a radius of scarcely a hundred yards, there lay my four buffaloes.

I am not for unreasoning slaughter, but buffalo hunting is different. I am not ashamed to confess that shooting buffaloes is the only thing of which I cannot have too much. At least, not yet.

In all this, and above all in the matter of photography, my great stand-by was my English friend Runton, who, while I worked, stood just behind me always ready to use his rifle if things looked ugly. Luckily for me there was no need.

Without such a cool and trustworthy companion no one would be advised to try photographing buffalo at close range. I, at any rate,

## *Buffalo*

should not like to do so. I should be worried about the camera.

It was late in the afternoon by the time we had finished cutting off the heads. There were only three men with us, not enough to have the four heavy heads carried home. So we chose a spreading tree which would answer our purpose and "cached" the trophies in the forks of its branches.

Though it is not so simple to "cache" a ninety-pound buffalo head in a tree. We struggled and sweated for a long time before, with the help of a rope we had with us, we succeeded in hauling up the four heads high enough to prevent any wandering lion or hyena damaging them in the night.

While we were working one of the buffalo's heads fell down from the tree, and I only just got out of the way in time. One can never be too careful with such African buffaloes; even their amputated heads are dangerous!

Finally I took a photograph of the horned tree, and then we set off home.

It was like walking through a mighty Zoo. Whichever way I looked the country was alive with game. The nearest animals let us pass two hundred yards away. They scuttled out of our way one after the other as we went along, a passage opening through them and closing again behind us. Countless pairs of eyes stared at us in all innocence, not one of them disturbed by the slaughter that had gone on in their midst. Appetites were unimpaired.

## *Land of Elephants*

Only the wildly rushing buffalo herd had disappeared. They may still have been fleeing, for they had lost the cream of the herd—the four mightiest bulls. . . .

## CHAPTER XIII

### NO BUFFALO

As I was going through my diary, January 23rd met my eye as being a worthy counterpart to the preceding chapter, on the basis of "not jam every day."

A month has passed since then and I have come a long way since the buffalo slaughter at Embu. I have left Kenya and have come down into its neighbouring state, Tanganyika, which before the war was German East Africa.

A comparatively good road—for Africa—leads from Kenya to Tanganyika, passable enough for cars, but only in the case of someone who has no pity either for his own bones or for his car. Passable except when the rains are on; for in rainy weather the Tanganyika road forgets all its instructions, disappears from the face of the earth, goes for a holiday, and only comes back again after a long time when everything round it has dried up. After rain it is scarcely recognisable. You will find people arguing as to whether this is a road or a water-course.

Do not irritate the motorist who has been caught by rain on that road. He has quite enough trouble without that. If he has a great affection for his vehicle he will make his camp in it and wait for

## *Land of Elephants*

the rainy season to pass, seated beside his driving wheel. If he cannot bring himself to do that, then he must take leave of his car. We found several iron skeletons beside the road, which had once been called motor-cars.

It was dry weather when we came; we bumped along without hindrance as far as the frontier in our rattling old Ford which had seen so many breakdowns. A customs barrier is at the frontier and beside it a reed-thatched hut with on it a notice-board bearing the legend "H.M. Customs Office, Tanganyika Territory."

The hermit of the hut, a native customs official, was leaning his elbows on the barrier and smoking a pipe. His figure was adorned, besides with the pipe, with laceless tennis shoes, a silk shirt as red as a bull-fighter's cloak, and a green tarboosh (fez). He had no trousers; they must have been at the cleaners.

I drew up in front of him. We looked at each other, he still with his elbows on the barrier and not moving a muscle. After a long time he spat, and without shifting his position in the slightest asked me what I wanted. He was not a very imaginative official or he might have concluded that I wanted to pass the frontier.

When I had enlightened him he invited me into the office and desired to see my weapons. We brought them all in to him. The official produced some short steel punches out of an empty fruit tin. His collection consisted of ten little punches, each with a little number on its tip. With these and the help of a hammer, he punched a four-figure number

## *No Buffalo*

on to the butt of all my rifles, making a careful and thorough job of it.

He worked sitting down at his table, but before banging in each figure he got up each time to bang the punch on the window-sill, to make sure it was the right one. More often than not the one he wanted was the last one he tried.

When he had finished this little game he inscribed the numbers with which he had branded my guns in a large book and I, at his request, wrote the name and date, for the official could only write figures.

That would have been the end of the formalities if only history had not willed that it should be Sunday. But as it was Sunday I had to sign a printed request in which I entreated the customs officialdom to be so kind as to set itself in motion in spite of the Sunday holiday. Just as an exception. On account of my identity and the urgency of my journey. In return for this exceptional strain put on the customs official, I had to put three more shillings per rifle into the State money-box—in which the official collected his dues—and only then did the gates of Tanganyika open before me. Or rather the barrier. Then it shut behind me, and the red-shirted official readjusted his elbows on it and continued his interrupted Sunday rest.

\* \* \*

In short, I am in Tanganyika. My camp is pitched on the bank of the dried-up Tarangeri river, and I am stung by more mosquitoes, tsetse flies and ticks every day than would have dared to sting

## *Land of Elephants*

me in a month in Kenya. My body is like a red-spotted handkerchief already, and I spend all my spare time scratching.

I am itching for buffalo, and extraordinarily big bulls are supposed to be hereabouts. But as far as I am concerned, they may or may not be. For ten days now I have been eaten by the tsetse flies; for ten days boring through these clothes-improving thickets, but I have seen no signs of buffalo at all.

To-day it really seemed as though our luck had turned. I was just going to start when two messengers—two natives with filed teeth and armed with spears—arrived at my camp to announce that they had come upon a one-night old trail of a big bull buffalo quite near.

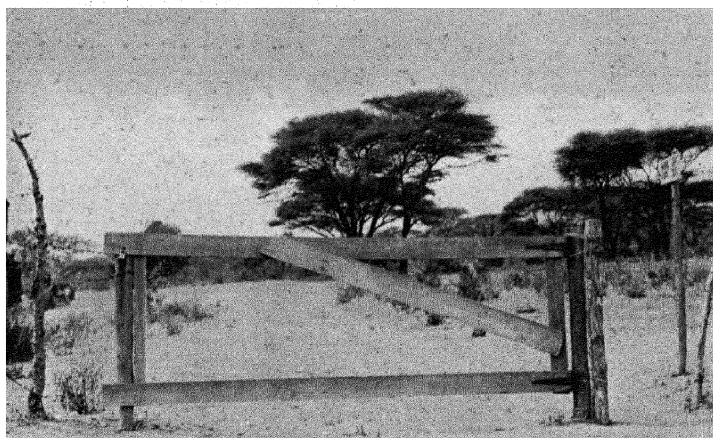
Everybody knows that in Africa "near" is a very broad term. It may mean five minutes away, or it may mean five hours away. So I was agreeably surprised when we came upon the buffalo track after little more than an hour and a half.

The rest of the tale I will tell briefly. It is not worth wasting many words on it. Better to get it over as quickly as possible.

After barely an hour's tracking we came up with the buffalo, a fine bull with wide, sweeping horns. He was grazing right out in the middle of a little clearing. I crept up to a satisfactory distance from him, took aim—click! Misfire.

He heard the click, threw up his head, saw me and rushed off. Before he reached the thickets I had my rifle up again. Again—click! Misfire.

I rushed after him, scandalising the monkeys

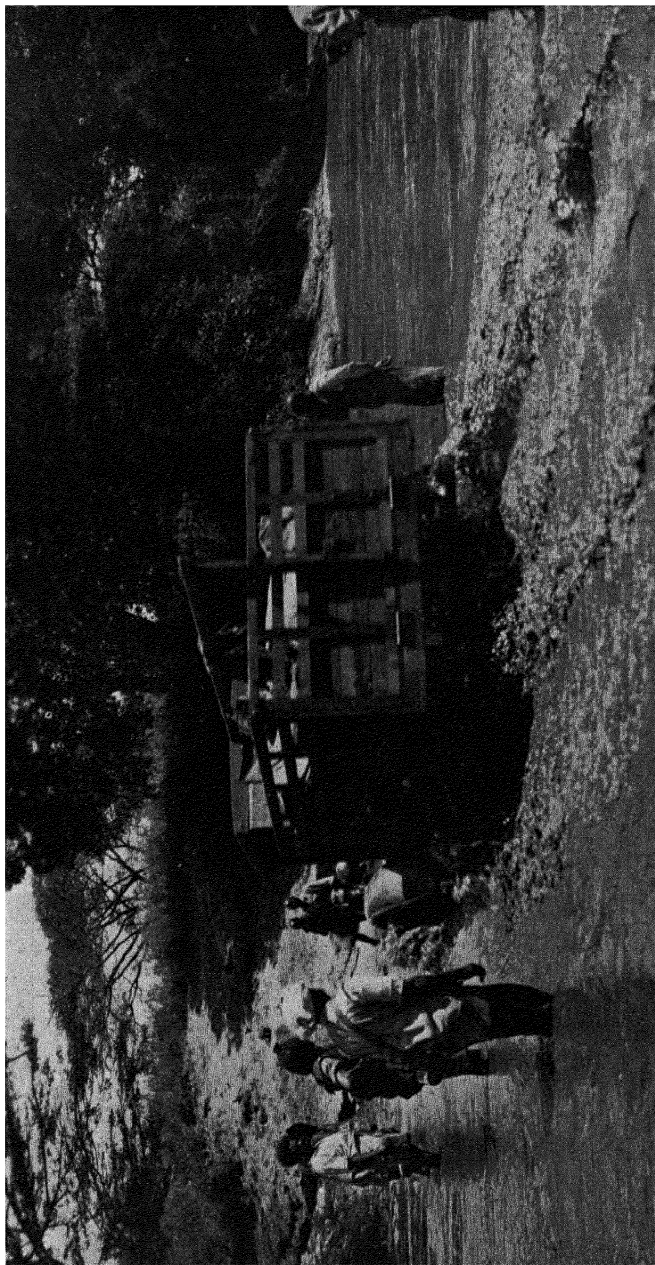


Tanganyika Frontier



H.M. Customs Office, Tanganyika





The Road to Tanganyika

## *No Buffalo*

with the choice of my expressions, caught sight of the buffalo again, and again my rifle would not go off.

Heaven protect the unfortunate gunsmith and cartridge manufacturer from all that I wished them on the spur of that moment. The more so because it was not their fault. A little dirt had got into the lock, prevented it shutting properly and so going off.

Behold, yet another proof that a repeating rifle is an untrustworthy tool which can let one down badly, and is, therefore, thoroughly risky in the case of dangerous game. I should have been in a fine fix if I had found myself standing up to a charging buffalo.

When I had convinced myself that my rifle was working again, I carried on in pursuit of the buffalo. The heat was merciless, the tsetse flies were stinging savagely, and I could scarcely slap at them; the thorn thickets became so thick that I had to proceed more on all fours than on my feet. And the buffalo, guessing that he was being followed, would not stop.

I followed him for another three and a half hours, when, suddenly, six or seven paces ahead of me—one couldn't see any farther than that—I saw his black shape looming out of the thickets. To make quite sure I even examined him through field-glasses, saw his head—though not very clearly, perhaps—and in case he should escape again after so much toil, I aimed at the middle of him and pulled the trigger. . . .

That time I had nothing to say about the rifle.

## *Land of Elephants*

It went off perfectly. Only the black body remained motionless, neither fell nor ran away. It could not very well have moved because it was no buffalo, but a fallen, blackened tree-trunk. And oh, how true had been my aim!

So had that fearful heat and stinging and weariness worked on my imagination. I had seen the buffalo's head and all. . . .

I had no desire to pursue the chase farther. These buffaloes were clearly not made for me.

To-day, if I am not mistaken, for my calendar has got lost, is my birthday. At home I have not for some time paid very much attention to this anniversary, which was of practical utility only in childhood, and which now recurs with ever more relentless rapidity, but here such things do occur to one. So much so, that it is as if I could hear my future grandchildren telling me: "On his birthday Grandpapa's gun missed fire three times, and when it did go off the fourth time he shot a log."

The wheel of fortune turns when one least expects it. As I was trudging homewards, a distant, well-known sound brought me up short. . . .

A crackling of branches, a squeaking and trumpeting. The noise of a herd of elephants.

Forgetting the buffalo and the misfiring rifle and the tree-trunk done to death, I hurried in the direction of the sound. I had no idea there were elephants about here. And what I saw rewarded me for all my misfortunes.

I looked down into an open, round, crater-like valley, not over full of trees and undergrowth, and

## *No Buffalo*

populated with the fifty odd elephants of the herd. There was some swampy water glittering in the bottom of the crater and the elephants were grouped round it, drinking and splashing each other and washing the little calves.

There is no better sight than a herd of elephants at their innocent doings, dawdling about in such paradisaical content. For instance, those astonishing, old, wise, anxious and careful cows, model mothers steering their tiny offspring here and there with their trunks, cleaning them and stroking them, bending down branches which are out of the reach of the little ones' short trunks, and protecting their offspring in the exhausting heat of the day in the shadow of their own great bodies.

Then that solitary single-tusked bull, apart from the rest, dozing, leant against the trunk of a tree, putting such weight on it that if the tree gave way suddenly he would go flat on his side.

Farther off that lazy pair beside the withered palm tree, scratching their crusty hides on the bark of the tree, one from one side and the other from the other, rocking continuously and rhythmically as though moved by clockwork.

Another younger bull, resting with his tusks propped up in the fork of a tree; only his big, fringed ears flapping.

Three of them standing under a spreading tree, young, half-grown beasts. Their trunks feeling and tweaking in the twigs above them, searching for something or other up there, and shaking the tree-top till the leaves come fluttering down in clouds.

## *Land of Elephants*

Branches cracking here, there and everywhere. Trees as thick as telegraph poles snapping in half like matches. The jungle does not quickly get over the visit of a grazing herd of elephants. For elephants do not break off only what they need, but take an especial pleasure in tree-felling. Sometimes they will spend hours bringing down a biggish tree, and when they have finally succeeded they do nothing but tweak off a few twigs and leave the rest.

What's that? Spotted me?

Suddenly the trunks went up, sniffing the breeze, and suddenly the tree-felling stopped. Apparently the wind must have shifted for just one moment, though the smoke of my pipe showed it to be all right.

They quickly reassured themselves, convinced themselves that they were wrong. For a little they went on stamping and shifting about, raising their trunks suspiciously. Then they returned to their business.

Then I noticed a little calf scarcely bigger than a St. Bernard dog. It was walking round and round its mother's front legs, popping in at the side, and coming out between her front legs. Round and round it went, indefatigably, round and round the motionless pillar of the maternal leg. The mother was holding a leafy twig in her trunk, and every time the little one bobbed out in front of her she gave him a wipe over with her twig brush.

But there might be never such another opportunity of photography again! For now my weapon was a camera.

## *No Buffalo*

They were already moving off into the forest and I had missed the best pictures of all. It was a question of moving quickly.

\* \* \*

I succeeded in spending half an hour unnoticed among the elephants and taking some thirty pictures. The result will not appear until the end of the month in the Nairobi photographer's dark room.

When I had exhausted all my ammunition I retreated from among the monsters without their ever having noticed my visit. They went on scratching themselves, taking care of their children and breaking off branches, without any idea of the excitement their unofficial photographer had gone through. Unfortunately the revolving calf stopped going round and round his mamma's legs before I could get anywhere near him with my camera.

With the exposed films in my pocket, I set off home as contentedly as though I were having a pair of hundred-pound tusks brought along behind me. Though I was not even sure that any of the photographs had succeeded. Even if they do not come out, they will stay vividly and ineradicably in my memory.

On the way home there was a rumble in the sky. The odds are that there will be a change of weather to-morrow. The sun is sinking down into a cloud of flame, and staining the western sky with vast fiery-coloured streaks, gold and purple and plum and orange. A terrific mixture of black and red and

## *Land of Elephants*

mauve inks. A sea of merging, confusing colours.  
The cradle of a tropical storm.

\* \* \*

But the evening comes, and pales and washes the billowing, flaming vapours, and spreads a faint monotonous opal across the horizon.

The opal is only a transitional stage, too. As you watch it, it pales and then fades suddenly, and sinks unnoticed into the night. The greyness it leaves behind has not even disappeared before, above it, the yellow diamonds of the Southern Cross wink from their black velvet bed.

“OO-OO-OOH!”

It rolls dully across the country. A mighty voice that makes one stop and catch one's breath. An African voice. The evening greeting of a waking lion.

I hear it practically every evening: it is no novelty, and I should have got used to it a long time ago.

But that is not so easy. I know of people who have heard it for years and years, who were born here, who were, so to speak, brought up among lions, and even they do not exactly yawn when they hear that voice.

It is not exactly fear, for there is no danger. Nor nervousness. It is something else, a kind of awe, a kind of invisible hand which takes you softly by the throat, rather like when there is a sudden rumble of thunder above you.

It is a peculiar thing, the evening roar of a lion. It is as though it woke long-lost, long-forgotten,

## *No Buffalo*

intangible memories. As though it reached down to a deep sub-conscious heritage of fears from man's primitive past. A dim consciousness of long-past dangers. Even now in our innermost, secret processes of mind there is present primitive man's fear. The fear which came at sunset, when from all round the roars of waking, prehistoric monsters came, when we had to flee to our dens because whosoever of us was left behind, stayed behind, and we might wait supper for him in vain. . . .

This is the "jungle fear" of which poets have spoken, and which the animal called man has never quite got over:

"Hid in our being, dim and deep,  
The terror of past perils sleep,  
A heritage obscure and vast,  
From man's unfathomable past."

LAURENCE HOPE. *Stars of the Desert.*

It is this which reappears in the form of a peculiar emotion, when a lion's war-cry shakes the peace of the night. We do not flee before it to our dens, but at the sound we nevertheless forget to draw on our pipes for a moment or two. Mine, at least, usually goes out.

\*            \*            \*

The lion is quiet. It only roared once. Only announcing to the world that it was awake. There are beings enough who fear him even so.



## *Land of Elephants*

The night is stiflingly close. An uneasiness and humming in the air. You can't sleep at such times. Distant ineffectual lightning plays across the sky. We had better look to the guy-ropes. There will be a storm to-night.

## CHAPTER XIV

### LIONS AND A CAMERA

*Serengeti Plains. February, 1934.*

THE Serengeti Plains, famous for their wealth of game, spread across the northern part of the pre-war German colony, Tanganyika Territory.

For the most part this famous hunting-ground is an apparently endless plain, with forest only here and there; and that not real forest where one may lose oneself, not a wilderness of vegetation such as I described in telling of my elephant hunts, but clear and sparse, with park-like clumps of trees, rather like an enormous orchard, where the fine spreading trees are not exactly in rows, but are at a convenient and proper distance from one another; and in their shade there is green, velvety turf, as though made for meditation. There you can forget entirely that you are in the virgin wilderness, for everything is so friendly and soft and mild that you begin to look round for garden benches, and would not be astonished to find botanical labels attached to the trees. And there are more lions there than anywhere else in Africa!

Scattered about the open plains, rock mounds of different sizes catch one's eye. They consist of big rust-red or silvery-grey boulders, sometimes almost mushroom shaped, piled higgledy-piggledy one on top of another and gleaming in the

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sunlight as though they were freshly wet; from a distance one could easily take these accumulations for castle ruins. The chinks and dens in them are magnificent homes, positive fortresses for lion.

The fabulous wealth of game of the Serengeti has owed its virgin state, until now, to the fact that it is far from all habitations, far from the railway, there is no road leading to it, and the approach to it is far from easy. The gates of the outer world shut behind the hunter who comes so far. The nearest outpost of civilisation is Arusha some 300 miles away. That is the nearest place to get petrol, there is the nearest doctor, post office—and that with a post only twice a week from Nairobi. So if the hunter has no aeroplane, which unfortunately has lately begun to come into fashion, he can give up the idea of newspapers. As a matter of fact, I heard about a mad American here who used to send his aeroplane in every morning for a newspaper. He could not go to sleep without it.

If I had any say in the matter, I would forbid not only aeroplanes but cars as well, and let everybody who wanted to hunt here walk his 300 miles. Everybody, that is, except me.

Incidentally they say the English are soon going to forbid all hunting on the Serengeti Plains to ensure the continued true and paradisaical existence of the game. The lions must be protected from the aeroplanes.

For myself, apart from the desire to see the Serengeti, of which I had only heard, I was brought here with one object: to photograph lions. I had

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long wanted to make a campaign of photography, to the exclusion of the rifle, against the King of Beasts. For to my mind a successful picture of a lion is worth ten moth-eaten lion skins. For one reason, one can "hunt" with a camera only from a very limited distance, for it will not carry as far as a rifle, so that the first condition of a successful picture is stalking really close to the beasts. And if one takes into account the various conditions of a successful picture, the light, position of the animals, background and surroundings, it cannot be disputed that photography implies much more work and infinitely more patience than shooting. I very much like shooting and am a notoriously impatient man; that is why I am so keen on myself as a photographer.

I have spent three unforgettable weeks here, and would like to stay on longer, if my petrol were not running out. Though of my two lorries one is piled with nothing but petrol cans, and even on the other one there is so much petrol that no more than four natives can squeeze in beside it, and they cannot boast of lavish accommodation; tinned sardines must have a better time of it.

Since on account of the aforementioned lack of petrol I must leave here to-morrow morning, I will devote this afternoon to summing up the experiences I have had during my three weeks of lion photography.

First of all I must ask my reader for a moment to hold on tight with both hands, for I am going to tell him a big one, and I warn him in advance that it will not be easy to believe me.

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In three weeks on the Serengeti Plains I have seen 124, in words: *one hundred and twenty-four* lions.

It would, of course, be wrong to imagine that all the 124 were such thick-maned, imperial beasts as are found in Zoological Gardens. I only saw ten well-maned lions altogether. The rest can be classified as follows: seven small-maned young males, seventy-one lionesses and half-grown, thirty-six cubs of various sizes. Among the cubs were some hardly as big as domestic cats, but real lions for all that.

I must admit that if I had not seen them with my own eyes I would not have given credence to the accounts current in Nairobi of the enormous lion population here. The African hunter has much more ground for exaggeration than the home one. I must mention, moreover, that these lions counted in my three weeks were indisputably all different animals; that is, I have not counted lions which I saw on a previous day, which, moreover, would have been practically impossible, for nearly every day we moved to a fresh district, and lions, if they are not disturbed and have enough to eat, stay where they are.

I saw the biggest troop on the 31st January. Thirty-two lions together. I have never even heard of such a big troop of lions. There was only one solitary tawny-maned male among them; twelve lionesses and nineteen assorted others were the rest. This troop was probably the accumulated families of six or seven lionesses. They kept up such a noise and perpetual squabbling that I

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was astonished that the haughty, heavy-maned old gentleman suffered them to be with him. The old fellow was very much henpecked, and I shall have more to say of him later.

The maximum number of lions seen in one day was three days after that, February 3rd, when I saw forty-eight altogether. Of these, however, I only counted sixteen in the total, because thirty-two were of the family gathering I had seen before.

I only found one solitary maned male. Once I saw two fine maned lions together and—also, once only—two fine maned lions and one lioness together. She must have been a particularly favoured female.

Of the 124 lions I succeeded in photographing sixty-seven. Altogether I made 250 exposures, with three different cameras and with different and indifferent success.

To a non-hunter these statistical data will probably be boring, but he can, at any rate, draw the reassurance from them that there is no need for anxiety, there are still lions in Africa.

I worked out the different ways of getting within photographing range of lions with my friend, Captain Murray-Smith, who knows all there is to know about the Serengeti, and who was always behind me with a rifle at the ready while I was at work. Trusting in the protection of his extraordinary calm, experience, and straight shooting, I could actually put a new film into my camera when I was only ten or fifteen paces from the unsuspecting lions. If need arose he would put his bullets in the right place! In the whole of our three

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weeks' visit we had only once to fire at a lion. I shot a big maned male, perhaps the finest of the ten, who unfortunately would not let me photograph him.

Every day before sunrise we would take up our position on one of the rock fortresses I have mentioned, and from there would try to locate the lions. Then when the light permitted, we made sure with our field-glasses exactly where the lions were, how many there were of them, what they were doing, and what were the possibilities of getting close to them.

If they were lying in a convenient place and could be approached without their seeing us, we stalked up to them on foot. If there was no way of doing that, we had recourse to hitching a zebra, shot the day before and hidden close by to our lorry. We tied the bait to a long rope trailing behind the lorry, and then began to make big circles about three or four hundred yards in radius round the lions. Usually as soon as they saw the lorry they pricked up their ears and crouched down, waiting to see what would happen. If we headed for them they would make off long before they were within range. Sometimes they waited until within photographing range, made no attempt to escape, and actually assumed aggressive attitudes, trying, with angry snarls and an occasional pretence at a charge, to scare away the unknown monster bearing down on them. Then when they saw that the monster was not frightened, they would think better of it and take to their heels.

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The lorry was best for approaching half-grown lions which had already left their mothers. These obviously took the car for a rhinoceros or some other unknown animal which had wandered among them, and took no notice of it. But the old lions, especially the old males, had no liking for the smell of petrol. The lorry had no interest for them at close range, and they moved off as soon as they saw it.

If we succeeded in circling round them once or twice with the zebra dragging behind us, and if we saw that the lions' attention had been drawn to that bait, we would cut the rope and drive quickly away. We would retreat, lorry and all, behind the nearest rock mound, into the nearest gully, or to the cover of the nearest trees, and then, climbing up a tree or on to a crag we would watch the lions closely. We were, of course, always careful to cut the rope at a place where the bait should be somewhere near a convenient dip, mound, thicket, ant-hill, or other cover, so that in case of need we could stalk up behind it.

Success then depended on whether we had struck hungry or sated lions. Sated lions merely yawned and made no move to investigate the free zebra with which we had presented them. But the hungry ones began to prick up their ears and sniff in the direction of the zebra the moment we had disappeared, waving their tails and licking their chops, and then, getting up, accepted our invitation.

If the place was convenient we would prepare



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a "hide" of leaves and thorn bushes, and wait in there with our cameras set up and focused on the bait some ten or twenty paces away. Waiting in this sort of "hide" required a great deal of patience and much vain expectancy; but it is worth it, for if the lions come photography is easy.

In attracting the lions to our bait the vultures were invaluable allies. As everybody knows, these winged carrion-eaters spot any such tit-bit immediately, and in a matter of minutes appear floating down parachute-like from unknown heights to devour the carcase, without any invitation. And the lions always watch the behaviour of the vultures with the closest attention. The vulture is the lion's sign-post. Over and over again I had the opportunity of watching how the lions followed them, looking up every now and again, marking the direction of the birds to make sure they were going in the right direction.

By the time the lions arrive on the scene, there is usually a great collection of vultures squabbling and fluttering over the bait, hastily devouring as much as they can before the beasts arrive.

The lions that I watched usually approached the bait cautiously, but when they were eight or ten paces from it, suddenly threw their tails up and with a couple of lightning springs hurled themselves, snarling ferociously, into the welter of vultures. The birds, in a squawking, jostling mass of feathers, took to flight.

The lion, having taken possession, would usually stand over the carcase, purring softly, and with

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his tail curled up over his back, and only after a moment or two crouch down to feed. If the bait was lying very much out in the open, he would try first of all to drag it off to a less exposed place, not liking to take his meals in view of everybody. If it is not up to carrying the carcase—and a lioness by herself cannot get far with a 350-lb. zebra—then it is forced to set about it then and there. I have seen a male lion grab a zebra, considerably heavier than himself, by the neck and drag it off to a bush a hundred yards away. He did it going backwards, dragging the heavy zebra which three strong men could scarcely move, let alone carry a hundred yards at a stretch. Unfortunately I did not succeed in photographing this rare sight as I was too far away.

Three grown lionesses, literally shoulder to shoulder, combine to walk off with a zebra easily enough. That I have seen twice. A strong male lion took off a hartebeest apparently without effort. He took the antelope by the throat, but first straddled it, and took it off between his two front legs as if he were riding it. Practically all that was to be seen of the antelope was the head lolling from the lion's mouth, the greater part of its body being on the ground under the lion's belly. With this burden the beast could proceed partly in long strides and partly at a slow trot.

I must mention another strange and sometimes effective way of approaching lions by car. If we found a broad, gently sloping valley or hollow with a slope at least three or four hundred yards long we adopted the following procedure: We put

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the bait at the very bottom of the valley, and left the lorry at the very top, as far as possible from the bait, and with its back towards it. If sunlight flashes on a car lamp or on the windscreen the lions are badly put out, the flash of the glass being something quite out of the ordinary for them, and they are off like a shot. So we used to tie rags over the shiny parts of the car, or screen them with leaves. When the lions had come to the bait at the bottom of the valley we would let the lorry slide down backwards by its own weight, from the top of the slope towards them, without using the engine. Of course very, very gradually. We could not let it go of its own sweet will, but moved at the most two or three yards nearer at a time, and the moment the lions looked up put on the brakes. Then we waited till their attention was turned again to the bait.

We had good results by this method. On two occasions the lions never noticed the silently, gradually approaching lorry. Apparently they never even noticed that it was getting any nearer. I was lying flat on my stomach in the bottom of the lorry taking photographs through a loophole in the back of it. When I had finished, my companion at the steering wheel started up and drove off at full speed. Those lions scattered like poultry at the swoop of a hawk, fairly choking in their surprise, and then stood staring after us stupidly, completely incapable of understanding why that great bulk which had been standing lifelessly in the one place for hours on end, should suddenly be possessed of the devil. The poor things were so

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badly scared that they completely forgot that they might have been angry.

We hid the lorry behind a mound, climbed on to the top, and from there looked back towards the lions, now some three hundred yards away. They were still looking at each other completely dumbfounded. And when they had obviously not succeeded in explaining the phenomenon, they lay down by the bait and set to work again.

The people in the car have, above all, to be careful to be absolutely quiet and not to move. The tiniest incautious movement and the softest of words will betray the presence of a man, and the moment a lion spots a man under cover of that unknown monster, he turns tail and is off.

Now I will hand over to my diary and transcribe literally a few of the more noteworthy incidents from it. The following extract deals with the aforementioned biggest troop of lions, thirty-two in number.

### *Henpeck.*

When we spotted them the whole company was lying in a place hardly bigger than a tennis court, in the shade of a few trees. Only the head of the family, the only maned lion in the collection, was resting alone under a tree apart from the rest.

We put out the antelope bait we had with us in the car about four hundred yards from the lions by a deep watercourse which would be a convenient hiding-place, drove off a good long

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way, then, leaving the lorry, crawled back along the winding watercourse, close to the bait.

Our unwitting allies, the vultures, did not fail us. They had been watching us from some invisible height, carefully waiting to see when their turn should come. They knew from experience that Man, slaughter and a gory feast go hand in hand.

They were right, too. The greediest of them, two or three shaggy-feathered, bald-headed undertakers had already dropped down beside the carcase. They hobbled suspiciously round the remains, sticking out their bald necks, encouraging each other to go on but none of them daring to set to work. A host of their companions were circling round above the place on motionless wings at different heights. The lowest I could have hit with a stone, but the highest were tiny indefinable little pin-pricks in the sky.

More and more newcomers sailed up from all sides, high and low, as though there were a lodestone of appetite in the carcase, summoning the whole vulture world to the Serengeti Plains. There was no end to them, all beginning to circle like planets round their magnetic pole.

That was enough for the lions. As our field-glasses showed us, at the first appearance of the vultures they pricked up their ears, peered up into the sky here and there, in one or two cases stood up and came out from under their trees the better to watch the direction that the birds were taking. One young lioness even squatted on a nearby ant-hill, and watched the doings of the vultures from there.

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And as soon as one of the birds stalking round the carcase took courage and hopped up to the antelope's bloated remains, off set the lions!

It was as though they had waited for a signal from the vultures. "Dinner is served." Off they set to the banquet.

They did not hurry. They came very imperiously, with slow, soft, careful strides. First came an old lioness, and after her, in single file, eight dumpy little cubs about the size of fox terriers. It must have been considered most important that they should eat their fill, so they came first.

The leading lioness came nearer, waving her tail and looking like a big yellow watch-dog taking her puppies for a walk. Behind her were one or two more lionesses and some half-grown cubs with them; the oldest of them, with the old, maned grandfather did not move.

I had all three cameras focused on the bait, and in each hand I was holding a release cable; my companion was beside me, rifle in hand, and behind him my gunbearer clutching my own rifle. So, flat in the grass, we awaited developments.

The lions were about two hundred yards away, and the vultures had not yet noticed their coming. Several birds were already tearing away at the animal's eyes, the others, encouraged by their daring, were dropping down to the carcase, and the usual fearful squabble was beginning.

That was all the old lioness needed. Up went her head and she began to trot, her cubs trundling behind her still in single file. Behind them came

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two other lionesses with eight or ten half-grown.

The vultures had got so involved in their squabbings that the arrival of the lions took them completely by surprise. When the leading lioness was ten paces from them, she suddenly crouched down, put her tail straight up in the air, and then with a low growl shot like an arrow into the middle of the vultures, which, squawking and fluttering and bumping into each other in their haste, scattered in all directions.

The lioness, still growling straddled over her prey, her tail curved up over her back, and so waited for her assembling cubs.

But there were the other two mothers and their families! In a moment the welter of vultures had been replaced by a squabbling, writhing mass of snarling, snapping, foaming, bloody-mouthed lions.

Just then my best camera tipped over. I did not dare to move, and never succeeded in putting it up again.

The three lionesses were trying to drive each other off, each wanting to secure the food for her cubs. They themselves were not eating to begin with, but only knocking the others' cubs out of the way. There was all the snapping and snarling and spitting of the lion house at the Zoo at feeding time, only much louder, because in this case twenty-five lions were squabbling over one bit of meat!

Through the hoarse throaty snarling of the mothers and grown cubs came the thin, high squeaking of the little ones. They had quite got the

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spirit of the thing, and were biting and smacking each other and pulling each other's tails in a way that was a delight to see.

Then they scattered. Each mother tore herself out a substantial limb or side from the kill and bore it off for the benefit of her own family. The three different broods were therefore left squabbling on their own and, in comparison to what had been going on, the feeding proceeded peacefully enough. A good many of the would-be feasters were still getting nothing; for an antelope to twenty-five lions is about what a chicken would be to twenty-five men.

The three mothers were still not eating, but supervising the undisturbed feeding of their cubs. Though they, poor things, were probably just as hungry, but considered it better to have empty bellies than that their daily rest should be disturbed by the constant squalling of hungry cubs. And in the night, when the little ones would be asleep in the depths of the rock lair, they would have to set off hunting again, so that when the children awoke, breakfast would be there for them on the threshold of the den.

Six grown cubs, all alike, arrived. They must have been brothers and sisters. The unclaimed head of the antelope fell to them. There was not much meat on it, but they chewed it till the skull cracked in their teeth. Though their heads were laid close together, their manner of feeding can scarcely be called brotherly; for the moment one of them appropriated more than his share of the bones, his two neighbours flew at him and a fresh



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outburst disrupted the dubious harmony of their family relations.

By this time they were nearly all there, only the old gentleman and the two lionesses with him being still lacking. They had come part of the way, but had lain down again before they arrived. They were apparently not hungry. They yawned till you would have thought their jaws would crack. They must have fed well in the night. Or perhaps they were only waiting for the younger generation to finish. In that case they had adopted a mistaken policy. The others were already cracking nothing but bare bones.

Till then I had hardly taken any photographs, waiting for the big lion and not daring to change a film in case they should notice me.

At last! The old gentleman got up, his muscles tautened, and he stretched mightily. Then sleepily, unwillingly, grimly, his rugged head held low, he moved towards the bait. The two lionesses did not come with him, but stayed under the tree, laying more store by their rest than by cracking of bones.

The old man arrived. A magnificent beast. His thick, shaggy, yellowy-grey mane was a tousled frame to his wrinkled countenance, and his long dog-teeth flashed white from his gaping mouth as he panted in the heat. He prowled round the feasting groups, carefully stepping back from the mother-lions' snapping threats at the disturber of their cubs' meal, his half-closed amber-coloured eyes expressing an infinite indifference and superiority. His poor old head was sadly conscious

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of his night out, his disturbed rest, and above all, the cares incident to a family of six wives and twenty children. The air of infinite boredom with which he contemplated his family, the tremendous interminable yawn which threatened to swallow all three of us even at that distance and with which he answered the snarls of his harem, and finally the pitiful, heartfelt sigh with which he drifted into the circle of his family—these were all unmistakable. Clearer than any speech they said: "I ask you, is this what it must come to. . . ?"

Oh, if the poor old thing had only known. . . .

But then he suddenly set about showing them who was master of the house after all. He got up, lashed his tail, showed his teeth, bristled up his mane, and putting aside all considerations of fatherly love and tenderness, with a tremendous grunt charged straight into the cubs, sending them flying like ninepins in all directions.

Then he picked up the antelope's backbone, shook the rattling skeleton thoroughly, and in great disgust threw it aside. The others stood round in a half-circle and gasped with astonishment at papa, so surprised that they could not utter a sound.

Lying to one side was a bit of the animal's entrails, a white piece about two yards long, which had been left untouched. The lion grabbed one end of it, and began to walk off with it and the stomach which was attached to its other end, when with sudden courage about eight cubs hurled themselves on the mass of the stomach as it

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dragged along. The old lion backed, tugging on his end, and the cubs bunched together and pulled on their end, neither giving way and setting up a right royal tug-of-war. One could have sworn they knew they were being photographed. And I, of course, clicked off my cameras one after the other.

The tug-of-war lasted at least three minutes before the lionesses recovered from their surprise at father's astonishing outburst. Then they came to their senses. One of them, a greyish, mangy-coated harpy, a real mother-in-law, leapt at the hauling male with such a snarl that poor papa immediately began to regret the little bit of courage he had worked up so unwillingly. Without the slightest resistance, he let go his end of the rope. "All right, all right, I'm going. There's no need to start shouting at me!" he said mildly, almost apologetically. And how little and humble he had suddenly become! Though he was a mighty enough beast to have torn ten loud-mouthed wives to pieces, if he had dared.

But he had long given up all such thoughts. He turned his back on his wrangling females and wandered off to the shade of a thorn-bush, and there his shaggy head drooped in sleep. Not another word did he utter.

Even for a very imperial lion with six wives life has its trials.

The old fellow slept. One of the few occasions when he was at peace. Dreaming of his bachelor days. . . .

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### *The Hare-hunter and the Tree-climber.*

I spotted three lionesses apparently roving about aimlessly in completely open and short-grassed country. Through my field-glasses I could see their every movement quite clearly. They were still quite far away and I was wondering how I could get them within range of my camera when suddenly in front of one of the lionesses a hare started up.

The lioness was wide awake, though apparently she had been trotting along carelessly and half asleep. She crouched like a flash, struck with her right paw quick as a fencer's riposte, and hit the running hare, so to speak, on the wing, and tumbled it over and over lifeless like a little bundle of rags.

The accuracy and amazing speed of that lightning reflex movement were fearful. The lioness had struck in the twinkling of an eye as though a spring had gone off inside her.

Then she picked up the hare—the very image of a domestic cat with a mouse in her mouth. She saw her companions coming up and took to her heels. Off went the other two in pursuit, harrying her in a feline “Jeu de Barre.” But the ribbon, that is the hare, still remained in the mouth of its rightful owner. The other two gave up, evidently considering that a little hare scarcely enough for one mouthful was not worth any more chasing. They continued on their way and left their companion behind with the hare. She was in no hurry to devour her booty, however. She must

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have been afraid of her friends disturbing her again. She stood where she was with the hare in her mouth waiting till the others had trotted well ahead. Then with a couple of gulps she devoured her prey, and trotted off after her colleagues.

I would not have believed that a lion would have concerned itself with such small fry. They say, however, that lions catch mice and even frogs. Three years ago I myself saw one fishing in a swampy piece of water in the half dry bed of the Mara River.

As the three lionesses had not noticed me, I stalked after them. I did not regret it, for quite soon they led me to an assembly of lions twelve strong. The whole company was in the cool shade of a few acacia trees, most favourably placed: I could creep up to within photographing range under cover of a big thorn bush. There were fifteen of them in all, for the three "Jeu de Barre" players were lying with them. They were young, nearly full-grown lionesses, with not an old one to be seen amongst them. Of most of them there were only their heads or ear-tips to be seen above the grass. And there was one of them lying on her back with all four legs upwards, fast asleep.

I was just getting ready to take some photographs when I discovered the sixteenth member of the picnic. She had chosen a most unusual resting place. She was up in the fork of an acacia, twelve feet from the ground and there sleeping the sleep of the just. Her tail and back legs were dangling down among the branches as though she and they were completely lifeless. How she got up

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the smooth, branchless trunk, whether by climbing or by one mighty jump, I should like to know myself. And why? The soft grass below must be much more comfortable. But she apparently laid greater value on the view than on her comfort.

After I had taken my pictures we succeeded in retreating again, unnoticed, without disturbing the company's siesta. I hurried off back to camp, to put that day's precious bag, my picture of a lion sleeping up a tree, into an air-tight tin as quickly as possible.

### *My Lion Hunting-Companion.*

The last day. We set off in the morning, everything packed on to the lorries, heading out of the Serengeti Plains. As we passed one of the familiar mounds from which we had spied out the country, I could not resist looking at this fabulous game region from its top one last time. There had been enough lions roaring all round us in the night, and I might get a farewell sight of one.

I was not wrong. Quite a distance away—at least five hundred yards—in the middle of that limitless grass-land, with not the tiniest bush to offer any cover, there was lying a mighty, solitary, dark-maned lion.

No, we could not leave him unphotographed.

Agreed; but first of all we must get somewhere near him. And the country all round him was as flat as a billiard table, without a bush or a gully or the tiniest mound anywhere near. We had no bait on the lorry, and there would have been no room

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for it anyway, for we were loaded like a removal-van.

Just for luck, all the same. We ran back to the lorry and hurled down from it the whole carefully-stacked mound of packages so laboriously roped. Then, under cover of our look-out mound, and with it damping the noise, off we buzzed in the empty lorry in the opposite direction from the lion. We were looking for bait, hoping that we could induce the lion with a tit-bit of meat to move to a more favourable position.

To begin with there was not an animal to be seen. That often happens, though when one does not need them they stand round one in their thousands.

After quite a long time three zebras appeared. But they would never let us come within range, always rushing off just as I was preparing to take aim. At last, in spite of being at an extremely awkward distance, I managed to get a shot, which only broke one of the zebras' forelegs below the knee. Of course all three careered off, the wounded one leading and never noticing his one leg short.

Away they rushed into the blue, or they would have if some undiscoverable chance had not made them suddenly change direction. They swerved off in a big half-circle and headed straight for the basking lion on the other side of our look-out mound. And as soon as we saw that we turned and drove at full speed for the mound.

We arrived, jumped out and ran up to the top—just in time! Though we knew exactly where the lion lay we could not see him, for he had obviously

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crouched when he saw the zebras coming. The direction they were taking would bring them a little to one side, about two hundred yards from the lion. The sun was shining straight in the galloping zebras' eyes, which must have been why they did not spot the lion. I was panting from my run and my field-glasses were blurred with my sweat—out with my handkerchief—a quick wipe at the lenses—up with the glass again—now the zebras are level with the lion—— Ah! now——

Nothing happened. They were past the lion. But he must be there for we had not seen him move off.

Ah! There! Up, and hurling himself after the zebras!

He was charging with amazing speed, almost flying, closing on the zebras with every bound. . . . And they were spurting, laying themselves out like a racehorse under the whip, belly to the ground, dust flying—flying for their lives!

Oh, now, the wretched three-legged one was failing. He was suddenly running last, spurting for all he was worth, but three legs were not enough. . . .

The lion had realised the situation, and was flying at the doomed zebra like inexorable fate. . . .

Instinctively I grabbed my rifle, though it was no use, for I was five or six hundred yards away and the Serengeti is a game preserve. . . .

Just as I raised my field-glasses to my eyes again the lion reached his victim, though the chase still held.

Now! . . . The lion rose, hurled himself clean on to the zebra's back and over they went together. . . .

A cloud of dust.



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And when the cloud sank, the zebra was lying motionless in front of the lion. Only his back legs twitched once or twice and then were still. . . .

\* \* \*

The sight of that shook me up quite extraordinarily. I felt myself responsible. I had driven that unfortunate three-legged zebra straight into the lion's mouth. If I had not wounded it, its killer might never have overtaken it. Though I myself had wanted nothing less than to kill it.

And after all nothing special had happened. Only a hungry lion catching its dinner!

It was the amazing quickness with which it killed the zebra. A rifle bullet never killed so quickly. The lion broke its victim's neck as it leapt, or rather as they fell together. The hangman's drop could not have done it more neatly. I had my glasses up the whole time, but there was not a trace of any struggle or scuffle; the whole was done with as deadly a speed and certainty as a clean hit with a fly-swotter.

\* \* \*

The lion was still standing over the dead zebra, in no hurry to begin his meal. He even trotted away several paces, lay down, and from there inspected his prey. Perhaps he was not hungry and had only killed the zebra because he had caught the smell of blood.

He stood up at last, walked back again, seized his victim by the throat and shook it as though to convince himself that it was really dead. Then he let it go, crouched down beside it, and began his meal.

## *Lions and a Camera*

While we were watching proof of his excellent appetite, Tumbo, my gunbearer, suddenly spoke:

"There's another!"

And, indeed, the shape of yet another lion was emerging from the quivering heat haze over the plains. To it we turned our field-glasses. This too was a solitary, maned male, trotting steadily towards its colleague with the zebra. From somewhere or other it must have seen the kill and come along over for a free meal. If it could eat its fill now it could rest all night and not have the trouble of hunting.

We began to hope we were going to have front seats at a fine show, and that the zebra-killer would quarrel with his uninvited guest. But nothing of the sort happened. The newcomer crouched down by the victim and joined peaceably in the meal. They never said a word to each other. They must have been old pals.

Oh, if only I were over there with my camera! Two such magnificent maned lions in one picture would be a unique photographic trophy. We could not entice them away now. There could be no question of getting any nearer, for lack of cover. What were we to do?

We got into the lorry, trundled out from behind our mound, and headed with a tremendous racket straight for the lions.

They saw us, stopped eating, sat up on their haunches and stared at us, bewildered. Then, obviously thinking we had not seen them yet—poor simple souls—they crouched down till they were almost invisible. They even sank those shaggy

## *Land of Elephants*

great heads of theirs into the span-high grass till they looked no bigger than a couple of mole-hills.

But when they saw that we were heading straight for them, they leapt up—we must have been about two hundred yards away at the moment—gave up the zebra and took to their heels. We drove up to the zebra—they had only begun on its back leg—put a rope round its neck and tied the other end of the rope to the lorry.

The rest was according to the old, well-tried recipe. We dragged the zebra close to a convenient hiding-place, quite near the foot of our watch-mound, and retreated ourselves behind a group of rocks. Of course, first of all, we drove the lorry well into the distance.

After an hour's wait there were the two lions again in front of us, looking for their confiscated meal. They set to work again on what had been left by that fearful monster which had so suddenly borne down on them. And they apparently never bothered their heads with wondering how the lifeless, half-devoured zebra could have moved so far.

What a sight! The photographic opportunity of a lifetime. There am I, ready with my finger on the release, but the lions will keep on covering each other; I don't want to make a bad picture of it, fearing they might hear the click as they were so near. At last one of them moves off with a great chunk of meat, bringing it even nearer to me. The other comes after it. They must be mighty fond of each other, for they share every morsel.

Now they're right, but their heads are too low. I whistle, up come their heads. . . . Click!

## *Lions and a Camera*

They've heard the click, and stare suspiciously towards us, while I scarcely dare breathe. . . .

A few endless, hair-raising moments; then they reassure themselves, and transfer their interest to the meat. Now to change the film, quickly.

With my eyes on the lions and in my haste and excitement I make a mess of pulling out the film-pack—and the camera sticks. Tug and pull as I will, the damn' thing won't move. Forcing myself to be calm, I try working at it slowly and cautiously. Still it won't move. Lying on one's stomach, twenty paces from two very large lions, is not the best place for repairing cameras, especially for people who know nothing about it.

My other two cameras were packed, the one in my hand useless, and before me the two biggest lions in Africa were crunching and gnawing without the slightest idea that behind that rock a raging, hair-tearing photographer is lying on his stomach.

But the first picture must have succeeded. Poor comfort, but the only one.

The two lions were stuffing themselves fit to burst, cracking away at the zebra's bones with a gusto that made my own mouth water, and blowing and snuffling and rumbling deep down in their throats all the time, and the wind fascinatingly ruffling their tangled, bloody, slobbery manes. Magnificent!

I didn't want to shoot. I couldn't take a photograph. I had seen enough, we had better go. Only we couldn't retreat unseen. The lions for their part were obviously not going to budge for some time, and as far as one could see it was quite

## *Land of Elephants*

possible that they would want to lie up here among our rocks for a post-prandial snooze.

I and my companion had a whispered conversation, cocked our rifles and then suddenly marched out from behind our rock and yelled loudly at the startled lions. . . .

They leapt aside, growling angrily, snarling and lashing their tails but they did not come any nearer. We merely raised our rifles and shouted bad words at them.

Finally they understood what we were saying and removed themselves in a huff.

\* \* \*

That afternoon, while we were bumping along on our re-packed lorry, continuing our retreat from the Serengeti Plains, we went over and over again the lost opportunities of that day's photographic expedition. How, if this and that had happened, I could have made a couple of dozen of the most perfect pictures; how I could have photographed every single hair of those lions' manes if only that blasted camera had not stuck.

It had not stuck for months, but when it ever did stick it was always just at such chances-of-a-lifetime. Luckily I had succeeded in taking a photograph of two maned lions together the week before, only from much farther away than these two.

But perhaps it was better that my camera should have stuck. They would never have believed me at home that those were real wild lions.

"Don't tell me those are wild lions. They're those ones in the Zoo!"

## *Lions and a Camera*

Here I must mention incidentally that there *are* many fakes among the pictures of "wild" lions shown at home. Not to go too deeply into the matter, there is an Indian in Nairobi, a shop-keeper, who has two tame lions. A male and a female. They are the Indian's house pets, and live in his house. I have never seen these pet lions, but I have often heard their voices. Nairobi is a quiet place, and if at night, when everybody is asleep, a lion raises up its voice, it can be heard a long way off. I have heard that this good Indian will, for the sum of ten shillings, bring out his animals behind the house and pose them to the taste of the sporting photographer in question. I have also heard that at the word of command the lioness will lie down, while the male rests his forepaw family-group fashion on the shoulder of his mate. Both can, at the word of command, roar, yawn, snarl, and fly into a furious rage. I have also heard that the Indian makes quite a respectable income out of them. The only pity is that the poor old lion has only got one eye, and so one must take great care not to photograph him from the wrong side. For in East Africa men are mean enough, if they are shown a lion picture, immediately to look if it has one eye or not. Every babe in Nairobi knows the pictures of that Indian's lions. There they never pass muster. But when they reach Europe they acquire virtue and value, and of this the Nairobi Indian is perfectly aware.

\* \* \*

This evening while we were having supper I

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asked my friend how many lions he thought there must be on the Serengeti Plains.

"There must be well over five thousand, perhaps even ten thousand. Or perhaps not quite as many as all that, say about six thousand. Oh, but there must be more than that, let's say six thousand five hundred. Anyway, how do you expect me to know? Count them yourself if you're so interested!"

I thanked him. Said I was glad to know at last exactly how many lions there were on the Serengeti Plains. I had often been plagued by this uncertainty.

After supper we set to reckoning out a really probable figure. The Serengeti Plains are about 3,500,000 acres. In three weeks we saw 124 lions, and in that time we must have covered say 150,000 acres.

The whole of the Serengeti is of course doubtless not populated with lions to the same extent as the part which we crossed. The final determination of the lion's haunts is the rain. Where there is plenty of rain there is plenty of grass. Where the grass is richer the pasture is better and there is more game. Where there is more game there are more lions, for there they can the more easily procure their daily bread.

So on the Serengeti Plains there is lion country of different qualities. And there must certainly be some parts where there are no lions at all.

But if we saw 124 in a matter of 150,000 acres, then, according to my reckoning, one can reasonably count 1,500 lions for the whole of the

## *Lions and a Camera*

3,500,000 acres. Almost certainly there are more than that.

But suppose there are only 1,500 lions. According to the experts six lions consume one zebra (or an animal of similar size) every day. Therefore, 1,500 lions consume 250 zebras a day: 91,250 zebras in a year! So the yearly consumption of the Serengeti lions is nearly 100,000 zebras.

How many zebras must there be on the Serengeti Plains if the lions alone require 100,000 for their larder?

I asked my friend that, too, but he did not answer. He grunted something about the tropical heat and the extraordinary effect it had on men's brains, but what that had to do with zebras I do not understand. However, anyone who is inclined to pass sleepless nights preoccupied with the extinction of lions may sleep at ease. There are still a few left.



## CHAPTER XV

### SITUTUNGA

*Bukakata. February, 1934.*

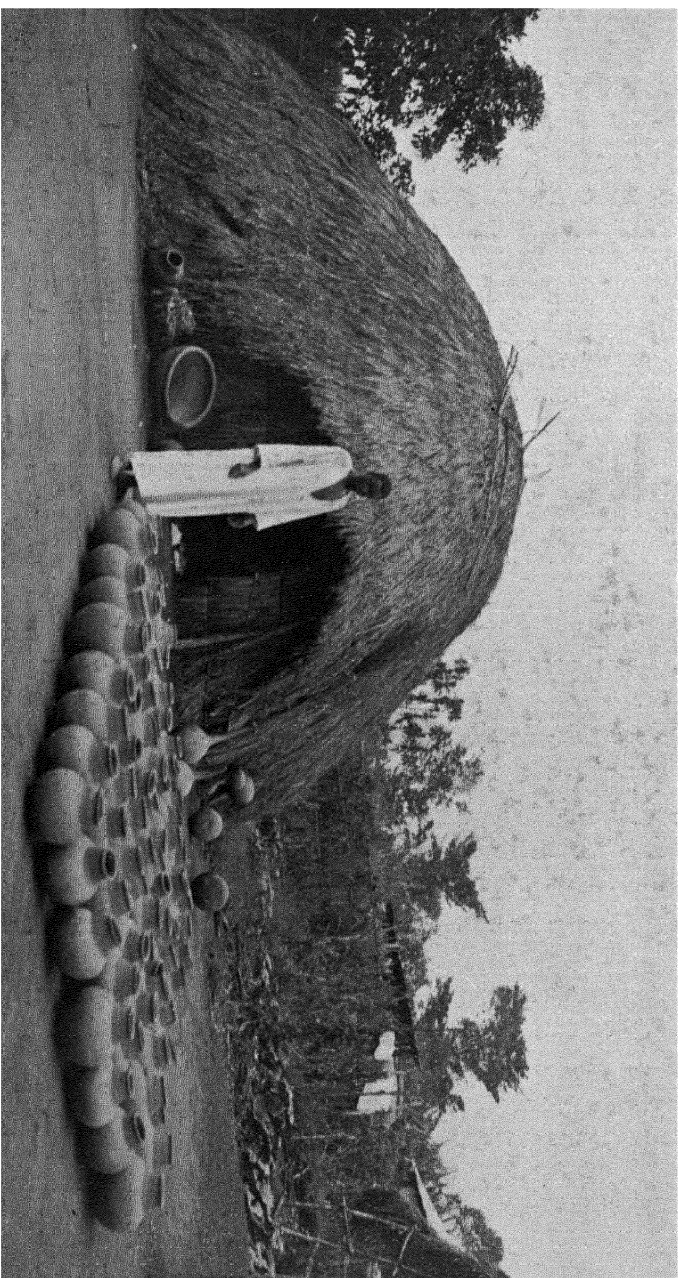
THE Situtunga is an antelope the size of a fallow deer, chocolate-coloured, adorned with white dapplings and stripes and with lyre-shaped horns. It is a swamp antelope inhabiting the impregnable bogs and reedy river-side jungles and swampy islands; and it is a trophy of which comparatively few hunters can boast.

Endless struggling through nauseous, leech-ridden, waist-deep swamps, fever and countless mosquito bites—these make up the current price for the average situtunga. It is a high price, especially as it *must* be paid in advance and quite easily no situtunga may be forthcoming for it.

The horns of the situtunga were still lacking from my East African collection of trophies. So it was my firm intention this year to try my luck with this peculiar beast.

The situtunga is unknown in Kenya Colony. My hunter acquaintances of Nairobi recommended Uganda as the nearest place where situtunga would be sure to be found, and, in Uganda, the swamps of the Sesse Island group in the North-West corner of Lake Victoria.

I first went to Entebbe, which lies on the



A Native Potter, Uganda

# R. E. A. A. A.

JINJA	54
ELDORET	252
NAIROBI	463
ARUSHA	653
MOMBASA	805
DAR-ES-SALAAM	1185
VICTORIA FALLS	2420
LOBITO BAY	3720
JOHANNESBURG	3494
CAPE TOWN	4478

# R. E. A. A. A.

JUBA	535
KHARTOUM	1525
BUTA	1257
STANLEYVILLE	1587
KANO	2795
LAGOS	3703
TIMBUCTOO	3960
TANGIERS	5734
PARIS	6783
LONDON	7140

The Forest Sign-post

## *Situtunga*

northern shore of the lake, to the office of the Uganda Game Warden there, Captain Pitman, using as introduction the names of two of my friends who were old acquaintances of his. I met with an even more friendly welcome than usual and soon received all the necessary directions.

Over drinks in the Nairobi bar I had gathered from my friends that most situtunga were to be found on an island a little apart from the rest of the Sesse group, called Dumbe. They had unanimously recommended me to go straight for the island of Dumbe, as only there could I be certain of success.

As soon as I mentioned Dumbe, Pitman declared forthwith that of the forty-odd islands of various sizes, Dumbe was the only one to which I could not go. The British Government had handed over Dumbe to the international medical profession for the study of sleeping-sickness, and hunters were forbidden to go there so as not to disturb the meditations of any scientist who might be on the island. I learnt, too, that sleeping-sickness investigators appeared at the most every Leap Year, and at the moment there was nobody there nor could anyone remember when an investigator had last been there. But there was no appeal against the order. If I had thought of it I would have said I was a Hungarian student of sleeping-sickness—all in the interest of my situtunga. Pitman would have believed it, in the kindness of his heart.

On the other hand he consoled me by telling me there were situtungas on every island, only lacking people to see them. He recommended the farthest

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island called Fumwe, telling me that practically nobody ever went there and that the situtunga there were so impregnable that, with patience enough, I simply must find one sooner or later.

"I was there myself last year," said Pitman. "I spent five days on Fumwe and I heard a situtunga splashing about in the reeds. I didn't exactly see it because my patience gave out and the mosquitoes were such a plague. But I can recommend Fumwe warmly, and I'll hire you out our only rickety motor-boat—I use it to send occasional visitors to the Sesse group—to try your luck with. But if you don't have any luck, don't curse me but the situtungas. I'll give you a servant to take you to the boat, too."

With that we stopped discussing the situtunga. The next day at dawn I left Entebbe in my lorry, travelling all the way on a comparatively admirable road. It is remarkable how much better the roads are in Uganda than in Kenya or Tanganyika.

In the remotest depths of the virgin forest I reached a fork in the road. There was a sign-post there of a magnificence such as is rarely met with even in Europe. It did not only announce how far it was to Nairobi, and to various places which might be reached with luck from here, but for safety's sake mentioned Paris and London, in case anybody should be wanting to motor straight through from that point. A remarkable sign-board. Only I could not understand how it was that the elephants had not bowled it over long ago. It could

## *Situtunga*

not have been there very long, and I don't think it has a long life before it.

The motor-boat harbour is below the native village of Bukakata on the North-West shore of the lake, about one hundred miles from Entebbe. There we found the boat among the reeds on the shore, chained to a stake. Close by, in a little hovel, there lived its crew: three grinning blacks, the eldest of whom introduced himself as the skipper.

The guide whom Captain Pitman had given me explained the object of my expedition to the skipper, and then we filled the boat with the petrol I had brought with me, my belongings and my three faithfuls from Nairobi. The skipper let out a terrific whistle—he whistled magnificently through a gap in his teeth, without using his fingers at all—the foul-smelling motor began to snort and set off with us towards our distant island.

To apply the name Lake to Lake Victoria indicates a considerable degree of optimism. For under the name Lake a man of average imagination ordinarily understands a smooth, shady-banked, peaceful, harmless sheet of water. Certainly not that infinite, tossing, heaving, raging sea, that seized on our boat as though it were a nutshell.

To be brief, this ocean called Lake is an area of some 26,000 square miles. It provides ample space for the manœuvres of the most ambitious waves, and they took full advantage of it. Each trying to out-do the other; just showing what they really could do.

## *Land of Elephants*

We reached the reed-fringed shore of Fumwe after seven hours of a voyage which will ever remain a bitter memory to all of us. Better forget what happened on the way. Only the three men of the crew were unperturbed; they, with the exception of the one who happened to be steering, passed the time in deep slumber. We for our part lost all pleasure in the trip. Especially my three followers, who had never in their lives seen a boat.

For myself, I fixed my attention on the intricacies of a cross-word puzzle, clinging to it heart and soul, although on dry ground there are few things I detest more than cross-word puzzles. But after a little—perhaps the sinister influence of the cross-word puzzle—a strang feeling stole over me. I felt pity for the hungry crocodiles of Lake Victoria and I joined my three boys, who by then had already contributed considerably to their nourishment.

But apart from the water, the voyage was very interesting. When we passed between two islands and a temporary calm descended on us and allowed me to look about myself, there were sights enough to be seen. The islands are covered in a forest of weird palms and shiny-foliaged trees, all welded by creepers into a dark-green, struggling, suffocating mass. Near the shores—which are girt with a swampy, waving mass of feathery-tipped papyrus and water lilies—pink-nosed hippopotamuses raise their snorting, gaping, clumsy heads, and where the shore is sandy or stony, basking crocodiles lie with gaping jaws, in enviable content. All kinds

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of wild geese, duck, storks, herons, cormorants, and ospreys are also to be seen on the islands, and when our boat passed near enough I could rejoice in the shrieking company of big, grey, red-tailed parrots.

The islands are for the most part uninhabited. Only very rarely was to be seen a thin, high-mounting column of smoke from the fires of human encampments.

Such few natives as there are, are degenerate, a defenceless and ever-diminishing prey to the murderous malaria and sleeping-sickness.

On our island of Fumwe there are a few living; four men and a corresponding number of women and offspring. They must have seen us coming a long way away, for they were all collected in the "harbour"—the little lily-covered bay from which they had dragged their own boats, three light bark skiffs, up on to the shore so that our boat could come in.

They welcomed us with gifts, bringing us heaped bananas on dishes of palm leaves. They were nice, mild, lean, pitiable-faced, fever-ridden people. To our first questions as to whether there was any "nyana" (meat) or situtunga—for there is no other kind of game—they answered that there could not be much, and anyway they did not know because they very rarely went into the forest because it was full of evil spirits. They stayed round their huts and fished from their boats.

Their island cannot be more than some 2,500 acres and they have lived there as long as man can



## *Land of Elephants*

remember and still they speak of it as of some infinite, unknown, mystery-ridden world. But they may have been playing up, not wanting to help us, and being afraid of our killing their game.

It was already evening by the time we had extracted all my belongings from the boat and set up my tent at the edge of the nearing forest. The wind died down and the lake calmed. The sun sank into it in a blood-red glow, and threw a shimmering golden path across the glistening water. As I stood on the shore, that gleaming path reached straight as an arrow right up to my feet; I could have walked straight along it to the sun. One would have had to hurry, though, for in no time the great fire-ball had ducked below the surface and drawn the path after it.

All kinds of birds, the aforementioned red-tailed parrots among them, were screaming and chattering above my head. A little farther along the shore hippos were splashing about in the water, and from the papyrus swamps there streamed forth, with the humming of a swarm of bees, an infinite multitude of mosquitoes. I retreated before them under my mosquito net, and did not emerge again that evening. I even ate my supper there.

Afterwards, sleep would not come. My thoughts flew home, and when they returned I kept them weaving a Robinson Crusoe story of my own, for I was intoxicated with the knowledge that I was the only white inhabitant of that distant Victoria Nyanza island.

I went on telling stories to myself, while round me were the bellowings of hippos come ashore to

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graze, and over all the soft humming of the jungle in the sifting moonlight.

\* \* \*

I spent four days on Fumwe. (I had not brought supplies for more.) I clambered and slithered and floundered backwards and forwards, across and across a maze of mysteries where no white man had ever been. I ventured into treacherous lily-covered morasses, where the ground quakes at every step, and where to step all unsuspecting on an innocent, bright green stretch of turf, is suddenly to be engulfed to the middle; where the morass perpetually hisses and gurgles and heaves and bubbles up a stupefying, nauseous vapour. I lay in wait at the going down of the sun and at its rising up. I tried driving. I promised all kinds of things to the inhabitants of the islands, but not once did I fire a shot.

I saw a situtunga, once, but only for a moment and well beyond range. Of the four nights that I spent on the island, two were cursed with such crack-o'-doom weather that sleep was out of the question. The water poured into my tent and all my things were wet through, and I was entertained with an unceasing thundering and lightning; the storm-whipped forest creaked and groaned and spoilt my taste for Fumwe Island altogether.

And on the last evening, when I was having supper, I had a fright that nearly made me choke on what I was eating. I was just setting about the chicken which had accompanied me into this island exile. The air was completely calm and not a leaf

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stirring, when behind me, among the trees, there came a sudden rustling as though an elephant were coming out of the forest . . . then a mighty cracking . . . and over toppled a large tree. Its top reached right out to my tent, and its farthest branches lay just athwart the tent ridge.

It took me several seconds to realise what had happened, and to get the chicken down. It had been some scare! But it was only an old diseased tree which had suddenly got tired of Fumwe Island. Heaven knows how many years it had stood there till the insects must have devoured its inside and it had snapped and fallen without any particular incentive. But why had it chosen exactly that moment? Why had it waited for me to come all the way from Hungary to have supper underneath it? Nor do I understand how it could stand, rickety as it was, through those two nights of tempest. Then it did not feel like falling. *Requiescat in pace.*

The voyage home was only a slightly less violent edition of the voyage out. In addition I suffered a considerable loss on the way. Knowing from experience that cross-word puzzles were quite useless as an antidote to sea-sickness, I chose as distraction this time to rid myself of the four days' beard which I had acquired on the island. I must first of all explain that I possess, that is possessed, a white enamel tin wash-basin, with a leather cover to strap over it. This is by far the best washing equipment for an expedition, for when you have finished washing you simply throw all your washing things, soap, sponge, razor, brushes

## *Situtunga*

and all into it, strap down the cover and there you are.

So, filled with a desire for a shave, I summoned my servant Mahomet, a Nairobi dandy with a Hitler moustache and an irresistible affection for my cigarettes, but otherwise admirable, and ordered him to scoop me up a basin full of Lake Victoria. So he scooped, or rather he tried to, for the rush of water snatched the basin from his hand and the waves closed over it for ever.

So left me my good old basin, and sank to eternal sleep in Lake Victoria Nyanza, after having been my faithful companion through thick and thin on four African expeditions. It was like losing an old friend.

The various contraptions from the basin had to be packed away somewhere; we didn't know where. Mahomet and I filled our pockets to bursting point, and then discovered that my hair-brush had disappeared as well. It must have hurled itself after the basin.

I would have suffered even that if only I had got a *situtunga*! But now there is little chance of it. Unless I come back to one of the islands again. But I have not money enough left for the hire of the boat. Pitman put a pretty high price on his rusty old conveyance.

When I had reached the shore and was sitting about preparing supper, a white man appeared. He was a bird collector, but seemed to be some sort of hunter as well, and was camping not far from the shore. When I told him what I was after he advised me to stay where I was for a few days and

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try my luck in the swamps bordering the lake. There were situtunga to be found thereabouts, too, and he would send me along a few expert natives to help me.

This was good news. I would willingly wait here, I thought, for it is easier to get food and there is no expensive motor-boat to pay for.

So I set up my camp on the shore, to the great delight of the mosquitoes. In vain we built fires, in vain I smoked violently, and in vain I smeared myself with ammonia solution. The more I did so, the more they liked the taste of me. Never have I met such voracious mosquitoes.

Early next morning three professional situtunga hunters arrived. They carried in one hand their spears, and in the other a large log: a "life-log" to which they cling if they find themselves sinking in the swamps. Each of them had a dog, too, a prick-eared, mangy cur of very doubtful origin. They explained that the situtunga came out at night from the impenetrable papyrus swamps along the shore, to graze on dry land. Sometimes they ventured quite a long way from the shore, were overtaken by daylight, did not dare to return to the lake, and lay up in the smaller clumps of reeds till evening should come. They said they would take these inland clumps of reeds one by one, beat them, and see if they could not put up a situtunga from one or another of them.

All day long we drove those clumps but not a thing got up from them. We found a few fresh tracks, however, which at least served to convince me that the situtungas really did emerge at night.

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However, that day was not completely unsuccessful. I saw "Abu Markub," the mysterious shoe-billed stork, the legendary bird of the famous Swedish traveller and animal photographer, Bengt Berg. Apart from the one which is in the London Zoo, I have never seen this prehistoric bird caricature. The hook-nosed witch of the feathered world. The nightmare bird which, until then, I had believed to exist only along the White Nile, in the impenetrable swamps of the Bahr-el-Ghazal.

Towards evening I was prowling along the papyrus along the shore. Here and there are little clearings in the sedge, and I was hoping to come on a situtunga in one of them. There it was I saw Abu Markub.

He did not see me, though I was scarcely twenty yards from him, unfortunately without my camera. He was standing on a tiny island of peat, among sky-blue water-lilies, motionless, looking like a grotesque masked idol. I crouched down and for a long time watched through my glasses "the most extraordinary bird in the world," to quote Bengt Berg.

The only life in him was in the big, stern, yellow eyes, blinking like an owl's; otherwise he moved not a muscle. In his steel-grey feather uniform he looked like some monstrous helmed and armoured sentinel knight. Then suddenly he opened his monstrous beak and yawned till I thought he would swallow all Lake Victoria.

He got tired of standing on his bog island. He stalked off it and strutted slowly, silently, and carefully through the swamp, like some big-headed,

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earnest professor. The sage of the secrets of that monstrous fen-land.

He stopped. His yellow eyes staring straight ahead, he stood quite still for minutes on end, then suddenly down stabbed his beak like lightning into the water—a couple of grabbing movements—and when he jerked his head back again the flicking tail of a big fish gleamed from his high-held, half-open beak. He jerked it down his throat and gulped mightily, nearly choking on it; only with great difficulty did he finally succeed in swallowing the struggling fish.

Then he was again immediately the stern, superior apparition of before, and he strolled solemnly back to his bog island.

The Hungarian National Museum would, I am sure, have been glad of a specimen of this rare bird (*Baleniceps rex*) but he is preserved by law; it is forbidden to kill him in all Africa.

\* \* \*

Encouraged by the situtunga tracks we had seen yesterday, we continued our beat of the reed clumps to-day.

We were already at the fifth, and I was not paying much attention to the drive, being occupied with watching two of those magnificent black-white-yellow-and-red storks fishing frogs—when suddenly there came from the reeds a terrific yelling and whistling and barking of dogs.

I grabbed my rifle—and there was the situtunga. Still three hundred yards away and heading straight for me, running for its hiding-place, the thick papyrus swamps of the lake behind me. A

## *Situtunga*

fine, long-horned buck. It was coming towards me as though pulled on a piece of string, never seeing me, poor thing, in its fright, though I was sitting right out on the bald top of a mound, visible to everybody.

The shot was child's play. It tumbled over hardly twenty yards from me. Its strange, large-nailed, sandal-like hoofs, perfectly adapted for moving in the swamps and for swimming, make it quite helpless on dry land. It tottered and tumbled before us so pitifully that I think we might have caught it alive.

"He never had the chance of a Chinaman," said my friend the bird collector, who was sitting beside me watching the performance. He was rather pleased with himself for producing a situtunga for me. "There you are," he remarked. "I can show you a situtunga any time, without your getting sea-sick."

So my hunt for the situtunga, thanks to my new friend, had turned out suddenly successful. I could have saved myself Fumwe, those stormy nights, the fright that falling tree gave me, my sea-sickness, my lost wash-basin, not to speak of five-days' hire of the motor-boat.

My friend the bird-hunter—who turned out, moreover, to know a great deal about elephant hunting, having been an official elephant-hunter in the Uganda and Congo for many years—had his camp a gun-shot from my own.

He did not live alone; he had a bedfellow. I am not ashamed to confess that I took a great fancy to that bedfellow; I fell for her completely and tried



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everything to entice her away. I had no luck, though I would have taken her home and been for ever true to her. And not only did I take a fancy to her, but she to me. And yet I had to leave her. Though I know she would have been happier with me.

She was a beautiful little baby chimpanzee. The bird-hunter had caught her a year before in the Belgian Congo. He had brought her up and would not part with her for the world. No, that is an exaggeration. He would have parted with her for forty pounds, but I had not forty pounds to spend on a monkey, and the chimpanzee stayed where she was.

I regretted it, deeply. I have never seen such a dear, funny little beast. No human comedian could produce as much humour as that one little clown did.

We made friends immediately I arrived, and the chimpanzee used to come over and visit me twice a day. She would arrive all on her own, and of her own free will. She would come toddling into my tent on her two hind legs, only helping herself with one arm if she lost her balance for a moment. She would give a soft little snicker, by way of greeting, and then put out her right hand for me to shake. She inspected all my belongings, took everything she could off the table and piled them all in a heap under the bed. But her most intensive concern was for the looking-glass. She would hold it up and make the most awful faces into it and be highly delighted with her own performance.

I always invited her to a cup of tea which was

## *Situtunga*

accepted with the greatest of pleasure, though she liked whisky better. She insisted on a good dollop of sugar in the tea, and if she got it without she would hand it back with an expression of supreme disgust. She used to drink it sitting in my chair, taking the cup in both hands and drinking as carefully and neatly as a well-brought-up child, never even sipping.

But as I said, she liked whisky better. One evening she was playing about on my bed, performing with the looking-glass and apparently taking no notice of me, while I was having my usual sundowner. For some reason or other I went out of the tent, leaving my half-filled glass. I was not out more than a minute or two, but when I came back my glass was empty. The monkey was still sitting on the bed playing with the looking-glass. She looked up at me with a perfectly innocent and wondering expression, as though she had not the faintest knowledge of the whisky affair. She even turned her head left and right as though looking for whoever could have had the cheek to drink it.

Sometimes we went for a walk together. I used to take her by the hand and she came walking along beside me on two legs with not even a droop. If I let go and began to walk more quickly she hopped along behind me on three legs, or, rather, two legs and one hand, but if she saw that she could not catch me up, she sat down and let off an ear-splitting shriek. If I paid no attention, but went hurrying on, she burst into a fearful fit of rage. She shrieked, and shook both fists at me and

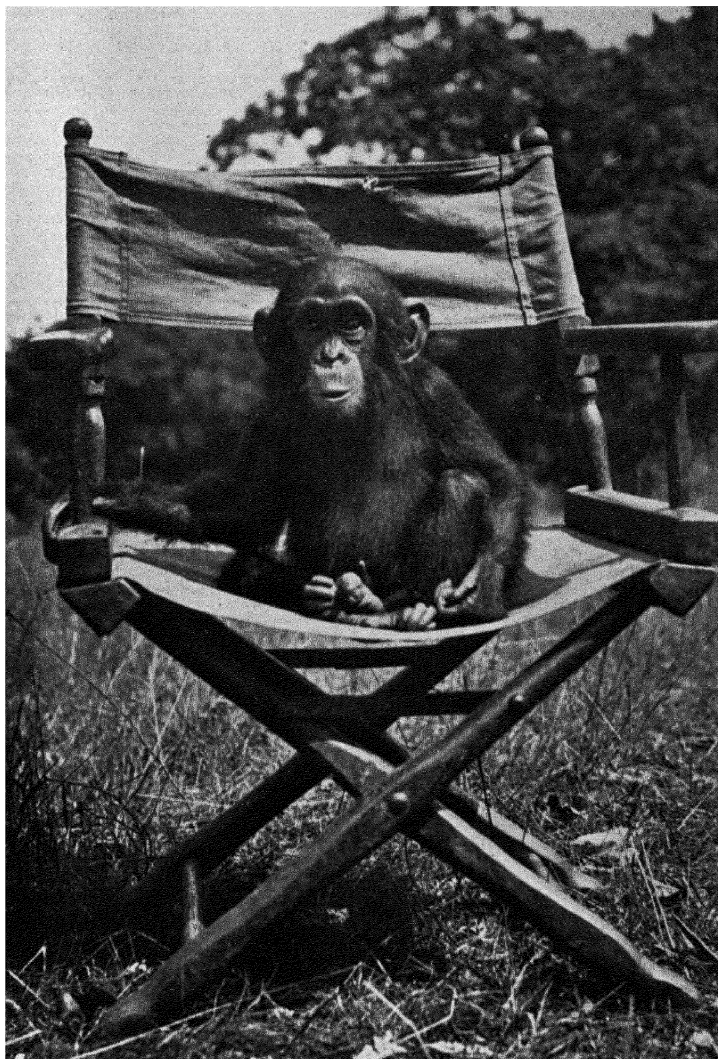
## *Land of Elephants*

rolled on the ground in her rage. Then if, at last, I stopped and she caught me up, she would climb up to my shoulder and mutter awful reproaches in my ear.

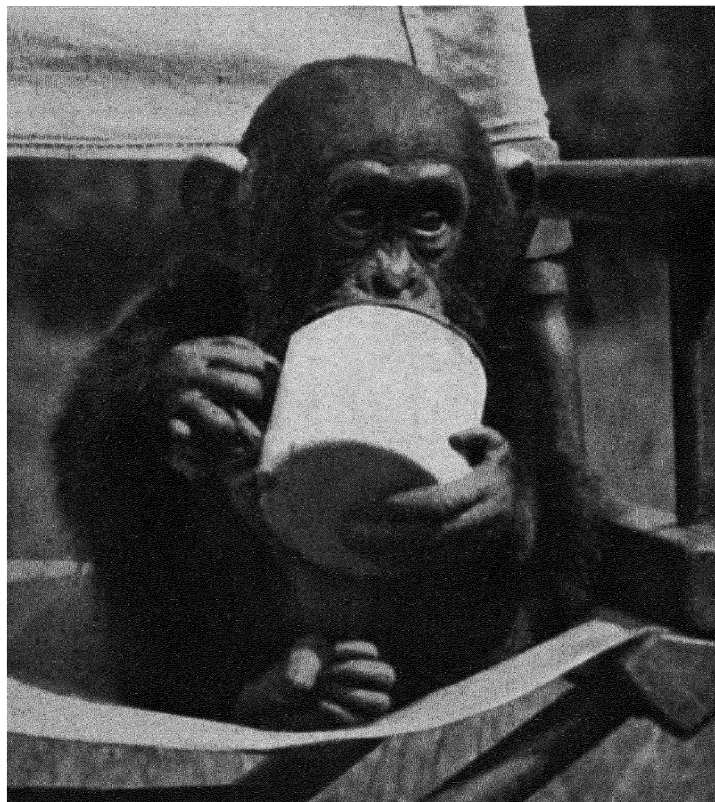
When I was loading up my lorry and about to set off for home, the monkey happened to be there on a visit. She shook hands with me politely and then trotted off home to her master.

She would have preferred to stay with me; at home she was often slapped. Whenever she did anything she ought not to have done, which was often enough, she got one or two on the behind. With me she could have done whatever she wanted.

And I had offered my best camera for that monkey. A camera worth five monkeys. And still he wouldn't give me her.



I know she would have been happier with me



I always invited her to a cup of tea

## CHAPTER XVI

### LIONS

*February, 1934.*

IN Tanganyika again; in the country between the Mbalangetti and the Duma rivers, near the south-east corner of Lake Victoria.

There is no equal in all East Africa to this region. Here, at any rate partly, quite paradisaical conditions still prevail. Here lion and buffalo may be hunted unlimitedly; they are not rationed to hunters by law, and not even a permit is needed to shoot them!

As a matter of fact, a licence is needed, because though lion and buffalo may be shot without one, antelopes and gazelles may not, and without these one's larder would suffer.

Why the law does not protect buffalo and lions here I do not know. Perhaps because practically nobody comes here. It is a long way away, beyond even the Serengeti; not many people know about it, and, moreover, this is sleeping-sickness country. And so it does not interest the majority of safaris.

In the course of my other travels I had not even heard of this bit of country. And now I am only here by the grace of my friend Captain Murray-Smith; and first of all I had to promise I would not tell a single soul in Nairobi where we had been or how many lions we had seen.

## *Land of Elephants*

These professional hunters are furiously, ridiculously jealous of one another. Each one of them tries to keep secret his own private hunting-ground which he has "discovered," doing everything he can to put others off the trail. They all behave as though they had properties of their own which it was forbidden for others to enter. There is always an elaborate comedy when a hunting expedition comes back to Nairobi, and some of the professional hunters inspect the trophies.

"Oh, I know that lion well. I've been keeping it for an American client of mine for years. And now they've gone and shot it behind my back."

"I could have shot that elephant six times over. I recognised him by that little split in his left tusk. I wanted to save him for a few years longer. I said to myself, let's get that chap's ivory a bit thicker. I ask you, is it worth while preserving the beasts?"

"Look, there's my buffalo!"

So it goes on. Scarcely a trophy can be brought in without some professional hunter recognising it.

That is why I had to promise Murray-Smith to hold my tongue. Otherwise, he said—all the rag-tag and bob-tail would be coming along and killing "his" lions.

So we are after my friend Murray's own private lions, and this time with rifles. I have done enough photographing on the Serengeti Plains; this time I want to provide a little diversion for my rifle.

Here, of course, lions are not as plentiful as they are on the Serengeti, and for a week we saw

## *Lions*

nothing. Every night, here and there, we heard them roaring, but so far away that we could not find them. And we did not meet with many buffalo either, though Murray has his "own" buffalo here as well.

At last, on the seventh day, luck turned her fitful gaze on me, and then—as I must declare in her honour—she left it on me for a considerable time.

It began with two bull buffalo crossing our path as we were trudging homewards in the dusk. I dealt with them then and there, dropping them both with the neck shot, a few yards from each other. I was very pleased with myself because a "right and left" of buffalo is not an everyday occurrence.

After we had cut off the two heads and had slit up their stomachs—so that they should the better titillate the lions' nostrils—we left them for camp. If there are any lions in the neighbourhood, they simply must visit a rich, free feast of that sort. Buffalo is the best bait of all because the lion cannot drag it away, so if they come up to it they will sometimes stay there for days on end.

On the way home we blazed tree-trunks as we passed and stuck little bits of paper to boughs, so that we should be able to find our way back in the half-light of dawn.

\* \* \*

We did not hear a single lion all night, but before the dawn, when we had scarcely finished our usual waking grunts and grumbles, just as I was shaking out the various bugs and beasts that had taken possession of my boots in the course of the night,



## *Land of Elephants*

there reached my ears a few, deep, muffled lion-coughs, straight from the direction of the dead buffalo. . . .

Washing and even breakfast were dispensed with. We hurled ourselves into our clothes, and away we went in the pale twilight of a saffron moon and the false dawn. And as the dawn began to paint the eastern sky with its soft colours we were close to the buffalo.

We could make out the black masses of the shapelessly swollen carcasses from quite a distance away, but the light was still deceptive, and we could not be sure if there was anything at the kill. I approached very cautiously, slipping from bush to bush, and when at last I looked out from behind the cover of an ant-hill—even now, long afterwards, as I write my diary, I get all excited again—my eyes fell on a big, shaggy, maned head, which bobbed up for a moment from behind the buffalo, and then bobbed down again. Round the second buffalo, which was lying a little farther off, were four lionesses. Two were standing quite close to the kill, and the other two were lying down, obviously gorged.

I was just about to slip up sideways and get a line on the maned lion behind the nearer carcass, when my gunbearer stopped me with a tiny click of his tongue. Looking back I saw that my man was pursing his lips to point to the left. In awkward positions the natives use their pursed lips as an index finger, to avoid every possible superfluous movement. My eyes followed the direction he indicated and there to my amazement was a

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second maned lion, already moving off but looking back ever and again towards his companion.

I could wait no longer. I shot that one behind the shoulder as he moved, and as the second leapt out from behind the buffalo he got a bullet in the neck.

A fearful roaring broke out. Both lions were writhing and twisting and rearing and rolling with a blood-curdling bellowing, biting themselves in their rage and agony, while I, as fast as I possibly could, pumped bullets into first one and then the other.

I had learnt by my most infantile efforts that a cat has nine lives, whether it be a homely old Tom or a Tanganyika lion. A wounded lion is no joke and must be shot till life is out of it. Better two bullets more than necessary than one too few.

When the five cartridges of my rifle were exhausted—I don't think it can have taken more than half a minute—there was no more danger from those two lions; but the poor things were still bellowing, and I grabbed hastily at my reserve rifle and put an end to them.

Meanwhile the four lionesses had leapt up at the shots, but then had stopped not forty yards away, and from there were growling nastily at us. I wished them no harm, though I could easily have shot them as well, but, after all, this was not a rabbit shoot.

For a few minutes we glared at each other, then, as they showed no signs of attacking, we set to chivvying them off. We yelled and waved our

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hats at them, till finally they slunk off unwillingly, and without the slightest sign of being scared.

Clearly no one ever disturbs the lions here. Those four, anyway, seemed to be unacquainted with the smell of gunpowder or they would not have stood there staring at us for so long. They had not yet learnt what the white man means.

We went up to the two victims. One of them—the darker, but thinner maned one—had bitten into his own forepaw in his final, desperate rage. We could scarcely force open the steel trap of the beast's stiffened jaws. The other one—which bore a lighter but much thicker mane—had fixed his terrific jaws in a mighty tree-root, as though that were his enemy.

They were lying not a stone's throw from each other. Two magnificent beasts. Innocent victims of a hunter's passion. Two peaceful, dethroned kings. Two mere sacks. We lugged them together to photograph them. They suffered the lugging and the flood of curses from the natives without protest. It was easy now to knock them about.

Just as we were combing and frizzing their manes to make them look all the finer in the picture, the roar of a lion suddenly rumbled through the silence of the dawn. . . .

It did not come from far away. A hollow, broken sound. The end was rather like a roaring stag in our home woods. . . .

Photography was forgotten, the mane-frizzing abandoned, and we hurried off in the direction of the sound.

The sun had come up over the edge of the world,

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and the warm glance of its great, magnified disc sent a comforting, quickening tingle through my frozen limbs. The millions of dewdrops glistened and twinkled, with a little bright rainbow swaying in each one of them.

But the tsetse flies had woken too, had grown hungry since yesterday, and set about our skins with a will, though we were already looking as though we had scarlet fever.

The lion had stopped roaring but could not be very far away, as its voice came from the valley opening before us.

We were moving through scattered acacia trees: heading uphill so as to have a good view of the grassy land below. There the lion would probably be drying out his dew-wetted fur in the warmth of the rising sun.

We were right. When we reached the top of the hillock, there was the lion sure enough. A male, apparently very old, and quite maneless. He was standing below us, within easy rifle-shot, his back turned, staring sourly at the zebras grazing out on the grassy land. He had apparently gone hungry that night.

There were plenty of bushes and gullies along the steep little hill-side. I slipped down nearer the lion and shot him—with my camera. He never noticed me.

We were just moving off and had turned back from our hillock top, when the lion roared again.

I jumped back to the hillock: A lion roaring, all unsuspecting, in full daylight is a rare sight. . . .

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I heard the preliminary snuffle to the roar . . . looked . . . but what the . . . !

For it was not my lion that was roaring at all. He was still standing where I had photographed him, staring at the zebras. Where the devil could the other be?

Down at the bottom of the valley a little rise, a bush-covered hillock showed darkly. He must be hidden behind that, for we could see everywhere else. . . .

Ah, there! Coming out! And not one, but two!—three!—and all three males! Incomprehensible how they could all have lain hidden in that tiny place.

One of them had a fine, greyish mane; the other two had inferior crops, being mere adolescents.

They trotted up to the old maneless lion—by the looks of it he was their leader—and lay down round him—four maned lions together!

And not protected by the law! Free to all comers! Four male lions to be had for the shooting.

And quite easily, from a front seat, so to speak.

My friend Murray was lying beside me, silently; not a word did he speak of encouragement; he was fearful for "his" lions.

Never fear. I won't shoot. For all that I drew a bead on the lion with the finest mane, and even carefully pulled the trigger—but the safety catch was up. There is a limit to everything. Two big lions in one morning is enough of a good thing. A third would only weaken the memory of the other two.

## *Lions*

For a little we still lay there revelling in the sight of them. They licked their paws, yawned, stretched in perfect contentment. Then we left them. Let them yawn on in peace.

As we were going back to continue our photography of the dead lion, a rhinoceros crossed our path. We were down-wind, the country was good, with plenty of good, substantial trees for cover. We subjected the old ironsides to a perfect bombardment of photography.

We carried on with him for about ten minutes. Finally we got so close to him that he heard the click of the camera. Round he whirled towards us, fuming, his nose down to charge, but neither seeing us nor getting our wind. When he grew tired of that attitude and made off, we threw stones at him, till he turned round, whereupon we dodged behind our trees again.

But finally he sent us flying, and flying for all we were worth, and we only breathed again when he gave up the chase and made off without having forced us to use our rifles. I had shot the two rhinos allowed me by my license some time ago.

Then I photographed the two dead lions. Unfortunately while we had been away, a matter of a couple of hours, they had so stiffened that we could hardly force them into the positions we wanted. That is obvious in the pictures. They look like two frozen poodles.

Then we hastily set about skinning them; and it was high time, for they had already lain there unskinned longer than they ought to have. I was

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rather afraid their skins might be ruined, but fortunately there was nothing wrong with them.

As we were setting to work on the second one, one of my boys suddenly gave a yell and jerked away his hand with blood spurting from it. We could not understand what could have cut his finger, as he had not even a knife in his hand.

After a little closer inspection, we found the iron tip of a native arrow in the lion's shoulder. It was this that had done the damage.

So this lion had suffered his baptism of fire a long time ago. He had even almost bitten the dust on that occasion, for the point of the arrow was in a very awkward place, imbedded right under the shoulder-blade and quite deep into the bone. That black bowman had known where to aim. He had only needed to draw his bow a little harder and I would never have met that lion.

I took the arrow-head home. I am going to keep it as a souvenir.

\* \* \*

We stayed in that "lawless" country for ten more days. I decided to try and get one more fine maned lion. There is just room on the wall at home for yet another lion-skin.

I came across lions on many occasions, too, but there was not one among them that took my fancy.

One morning I saw an old lioness out in the open. She was lying out, sated, blinking sleepily at the sun shining in her eyes and paying no attention to anything. There was even a herd of wildebeest, spread out in open order, standing in a big semicircle round the lazy great cat. They

## *Lions*

were snorting and stamping at the lion, mocking, jeering at their fearful enemy, the murderer of so many of their kin, who at night would have sent them all flying for safety.

The animals have absolutely no respect for a gorged lion by day, knowing perfectly well that there is nothing to be feared.

\* \* \*

This morning I got my third big lion. Again it was buffalo meat that lured him to his doom. On the evening before, I came across a big herd of buffalo, and killed what I thought was the best bull of them. But he went off with the shot in him for a very long way, and retreated into the forest along the shores of the Mbalangetti, where we found him dead in the thickest of the jungle. It took us half a day's hard work to drag him out to the edge of the forest. It would have been quite useless as lion bait inside in the thickets. We had to fell several trees before we could get anywhere near him, and drag out the heavy body with the help of a rope.

It was worth it, for at dawn there was our mighty guest—a magnificent tawny-maned lion.

The grass was rather high and concealed the beast lying beside the bait, so that I did not notice him at first and approached quite carelessly. I must have been a hundred and fifty yards off when he suddenly stood up. . . .

An unforgettable sight! He stood there like a picture. Head up, proudly imperious. Picture of tremendous, merciless strength. At last a lion royal.

He stared at me, motionless, never thinking of



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flight, and only betraying his displeasure in a soft, hollow, rumbling growl.

I shot him in the shoulder—rifle this time. He gave a fearful roar and a terrific leap. Then up went mane and tail, fangs gaped . . . he was coming with all the strength of mad fury . . . and his broken shoulder failed him. . . .

He whirled round, biting at his disabled fore-leg. . . .

My rifle crashed three times more in quick succession; then there was silence.

One great lord less on the banks of the Mbalangetti.

## CHAPTER XVII

### IVORY

*March, 1934.*

HALF-PAST six in the morning on the banks of my old acquaintance, the tortuous Tiva river. I have sent off my men up and down the river to examine the tracks of any elephant that may have come down to drink in the night.

My camp is half an hour's walk from here, deep in the forest, for here near the water the mosquitoes are unbearable. By day it is just tolerable, but by night they torture one to madness, especially my boys, who have no mosquito nets to retreat to.

A slender, feathery-tipped palm over me: the dirty-coloured water of the river gleaming before me, making little whirlpools as it passes, and gurgling as it laps its shores. On the opposite bank a centenarian baobab tree; on its shiny, silvery-grey sinuous branches—like the snakes of the Laokoon group—some long-tailed grey monkeys doing their morning exercises. And perched on the tip of its bottommost branch, which runs out like a rail over the water, a big black and white kingfisher, staring motionless down into the water.

I am sleepy. The elephants were making a fearful noise all round my camp in the night, and the natives, thoroughly frightened, spent all night throwing stones and whistling and kicking up

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such a din that there was scarcely any question of sleep.

\* \* \*

I dropped off there under a tree and only started up when my Kirongozi called Tumbo—which means belly—arrived with the words: “Tiari mkono tatu.” Which means literally: “It is ready. Four hands.”

There’s not much to be gathered from that, especially if you have only just woken up to it.

After a deal of thinking and more explanations I discovered that it was the desired elephant spoor that was “ready.” The “four hands” meant that the creator of the “ready” trail was, according to the reckoning of the Kirongozi, possessed of tusks four “hands” long. The word “hand” must here be taken to mean forearm, which the natives take as their measure of length; so a four-hand long tusk means one protruding from the animal’s mouth as long as four Kirongozi forearms.

One needs rather more than normal imagination to get all this out of “It is ready. Four hands.” These natives have a peculiar twist to their minds. Some of them have such a cunningly complicated manner of speech that it is like thinking of riddles to understand them. They are rather like the gentleman with a bandaged head who was going down a street and met a friend: “What’s the matter with you?” “A woman told me a lie,” says the gentleman, shortly. “But that didn’t break your head?” “Oh, yes, it did. She told me her husband was not at home.”

## *Ivory*

That gentleman would have been a good candidate for an elephant-tracker on the Tiva river.

For four weary hours we trudged along the elephant spoor without disturbance: at least comparatively so, i.e. no elephant disturbed us. For there were various consistent disturbances to our passing, prominent amongst them being the thorns. But I seem to remember saying something about thorns last Christmas.

A cobra, too, crossed our path. The Kirongozi walking ahead of me gave a sudden jump back that nearly sent me flying. Then he lunged forward again and hacked furiously at the ground with his "panga" (broad-bladed hatchet).

I knew it could only be a snake. But the undergrowth was so dense that when I slipped up beside him all I could see was the latter half of the cobra writhing in front of me; the front half had disappeared. "Kichwa nakvenda," said the Kirongozi. ("The head has gone.")

I have seen several snakes cut in two with a panga, but never one like that. The head with a bit of body attached had gone wriggling off cheerfully and disappeared into the thickets. The body had been left behind, but the head didn't seem to mind.

My hunters spat, one by one, on the remains of the snake. This is a very important precaution, making ineffective the ill luck which had crossed our path in the shape of this snake. I followed my men's example—this too is very important—spat vigorously on the snake, and we went on.

## *Land of Elephants*

Whenever I come across a snake I always think of my old servant at home, and of my departure from the harbour of Genoa.

When I was setting off last autumn, my old servant came as far as Genoa to see me off. He came on to the boat and fiddled about and packed and arranged things in my cabin till he had to go ashore. He took leave of me, left the boat, and then waited on the quay to watch it sail.

I can still hear the short, sharp blast of the siren, the flop of the ropes into the oily, smelly water, the blare of the brass band striking up on the deck, then the little tug sputtering into activity, splashing the dirty water in full knowledge of her importance, "throwing her chest into it" as though we could not possibly move without her.

Meanwhile, my old boy, slowly sliding past below me with the last of dry land, was seized with the emotion of the moment of parting. I could see that he wanted to say something more, something about having a good journey and coming back safely, and so on. I could see him stammering, hunting desperately for words, till finally he called out after me: "And look out for snakes. You mind the snakes. Don't you get bitten by a poisonous snake."

He said something else as well, but I could not hear that. We had moved off quite a little distance but he still stood there on the quay. I watched him through my field-glasses. All the other handkerchief wavers had gone away, but he still stood there with his hat in his hand, though he could not know that I could see him.

## *Ivory*

We two understand one another. We have known each other for a long time, after all. We first met when I was just one day old. "You look out for snakes! Mind the snakes!"

But this has got nothing to do with what I am about. Neither the gentleman with the bandaged head nor my old man's farewell. But in the course of four hours' foot-slogging one thinks of a variety of things.

But now there came an end to our peerings. The Kirongozi's investigatory forefinger was plunged into fresh, almost steaming dung. The moment for action was close at hand.

The usual undressing, the anointing of eyes, the red and brown powder, the "binding" of the elephant. At last we can go on.

And we had scarcely set off when about a hundred yards ahead of us a tree suddenly cracked and broke.

We knew what had broken it. If only he would really set about tree-felling in earnest. It is easier to get near him when he is doing that.

Wind? Favourable. Come on before it drops.

Suddenly shorter trees: then man-high bushes. And just there—the elephant. . . .

Not forty yards off, moving off sideways from us. A huge beast. His uncouth ears—big, shaggy-fringed sails—flapping rhythmically. Opening, shutting back, and at each backwards shutting a faint flap. . . .

The monster towered out of the thickets, which were well up to our heads, like a hound in a potato patch, and still we could not see his tusks. Those

## *Land of Elephants*

"four hand" tusks. His head was carried low, and the bushes reached just to the root of his tusks, covering them, concealing the most important part, refusing an answer to our most burning question—what are the tusks like?

What was I to do? There he was in front of me, nearly near enough for me to scratch his back, let alone shoot him. And what if he really were bearing, concealed in the bushes, a couple of hundred pounds of ivory?

I began, on the chance, to raise my gun. . . .

But then I had to stop myself. No shooting a pig in a poke. I had only got a licence for one more elephant, and I was not going to throw a good pair of tusks away.

By now he was crashing cheerfully along ahead of me so that I could make as much noise as I wanted without his hearing me. I slipped up beside him so close that I could clearly see the wiry tuft of hairs adorning the tip of his tail. His vast rump towered up over me like grey rock, the bark-like, wrinkled skin sagging on it like the flopping trousers of a clown. His ears were flapping like a night-jar's wings. The delicate, sensitive trunk was sneaking and tweaking and pulling and snapping twigs and branches left and right, and from that monstrous belly came the rumble of his digestion. . . .

But his tusks, only his tusks he would not show me. . . .

The bushes did not last for long and the forest soon grew higher again. It enfolded the elephant, hid him under its wings as a brood-hen hides her

## *Ivory*

chicks, and shut down behind him; I had lost my first chance.

After him, then. But I had got into such a tangle of creepers that it took a deal of time and trouble to extract myself. At last I too reached the real forest. I listened. Silence. I could not even hear which direction the elephant was taking.

"Well," said I to Tumbo, "you 'bound' him well."

"I didn't bind him here," he answered, "but over there, quite a long way away."

"Oh, I see," said I. "That's different. So we'd better go after him."

The wind was still good and the elephant could not get our scent. He couldn't have seen me, and he couldn't have heard me, so why did he suddenly make off?

I encouraged myself with such reflections. Another hour passed. We were still following the trail and being led farther and farther into the ever-thickening forest.

The sun had already reached its highest point, and was stabbing its beams perpendicularly down on our heads with its usual furious waste of strength. It was puffed up with its own indefatigability. Let it only wait another four hours and it'll swagger a little less.

Tumbo jerked up his head. He motioned for silence. I had grown a hundred ears at once, and was pricking every one of them. . . .

And then I heard it. A sort of blowing, as when a hippo comes to the surface to breathe.

"Sasa na lala." ("He is asleep.")



## *Land of Elephants*

Clearly the elephant had had enough of the sun, had stopped wandering about and was taking a noonday rest. Here was my chance.

The hippo-like sighings and comfortable snufflings went on, steadily giving me the direction.

Only again the forest is so accursedly thick that I can't see any more than I could last time, on Christmas Day. Though the elephant's stomach is rumbling away there, only three or four yards away.

Then an unexpected buffalo path in the right direction helped me. I prowled along it noiselessly, and saw the elephant quite clearly, from close range. He was standing head-on to me, his ears only just flapping, his trunk hanging motionless, with not the slightest suspicion that he was being watched.

I could examine carefully the long, thick tusks reaching low in the twilight of the jungle. . . .

Yes! Those are tusks—real tusks. This is the fellow for us. Oh, heaven send he may move a little bit to one side, for a frontal shot is terribly uncertain. . . .

There I lay, flat on my stomach with my rifle to my shoulder, the sun raging down on me, the sweat pouring off me, my heart in my mouth—and still the elephant did not move.

That, after a bit, is more than one's nerves will stand. At any rate, more than mine will. Time's up. Don't care what happens. I aimed at the middle of his chest and pulled the trigger. . . .

The fearful impact of the shot threw him literally right back on his haunches, but only for

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a moment. Then he was on his feet again and with one heave crashed into the thickets. My second barrel was fired blindly into his ribs as he turned. . . .

Two or three crashes and then I heard him fall and kick as he lay. Throwing two cartridges into the breech, I tried to break through to him, but by the time I got there I only found a billowing cloud of dust, the forest smashed all round for the distance of a biggish room, and—no elephant.

The place where he had gone down on his knees could be clearly seen, and on each side of it a round hole where he had stabbed his tusks into the ground as he fell. There was a heavy blood-trail.

After I had smoked the usual nerve-calming cigarette, and had had a pull at my water-bottle, we set off after him.

What happened after that I consider the most exciting and most unforgettable memory of my hunting life. We must have followed the wounded elephant for about ten minutes without hearing a sound. Then there came a distant, quickly-approaching smashing and crashing of branches.

"Na kudja rudi!" shouted Tumbo. ("He's coming back!")

The elephant had had enough of being harried. He had turned and was coming back along his own trail to deal with his pursuers. . . .

As I caught sight of the gigantic head towering above the trees, the widespread ears, the long, dirty-yellow tusks as thick as telegraph poles, the terrific trunk raised for the attack, I felt that I could demand no more of Africa. . . .

## *Land of Elephants*

I waited for a favourable moment.

As he turned his head a little to one side, I shot him in the ear.

With one terrific crash he collapsed like a monstrous, lightning-struck tree, and moved no more.

\* \* \*

Evening was coming on by the time we had finished chopping out the tusks, and when we set off with our 200-lb. booty for home, the rear-guard of the day was fighting its last hopeless battle with the pursuing hosts of darkness.

Soon the moon came out peacefully and bright, and benignantly showed us our way, silvering the tusks as they swayed from the pole across the natives' shoulders.

The long, weary way, the even greater ferocity of the thorns at night, could not have the slightest influence on the men's mood. The procession trotted home, singing all the way, though it was nearly midnight before we reached camp.

Natives always sing if they are carrying elephant tusks. They will even put them down and dance round them from time to time. It does not matter whether it is night or day, they forget hunger and weariness and are seized with the intoxication of victory, like soldiers returning from battle. Every one of them must carry the tusks, even those who are ordinarily the laziest, and each one of them is perfectly convinced that success was alone due to him.

This time they even had a band in front of each tusk, the musicians striding ahead and piping on a reed pipe. I could not find a trace of even the

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most primitive melody either in the words or in the notes of the pipe, let alone any relation between song and piping. Singers and pipers took not the slightest notice of one another. They even competed. It is true that each reed pipe had only got one stop, which is hardly productive of varied melody.

These songs are mainly interesting because the "soloist" composes spontaneously words suited to the occasion. The rest hum the refrain after him in chorus. They are epics, singing of every movement of the day's hunting.

Later, beside the camp-fire, I had the sense of to-day's songs translated for me, as they had sung in a tongue I did not understand. They were mostly about their own exaggerated heroism, and how in spite of troubles and weariness and sickness they had gone on that perilous journey. And ever and anon they returned to mention those who had remained behind: "Cowardly dogs, afraid of the host of dangers." And the chorus of that verse was: "But we will not give to you, oh, cowardly dogs, a single portion of the reward which our heroism receives from the Bwana."

This was repeated by every one of them with particular emphasis and conviction.

As I said, it was midnight by the time we reached home. The tuskbearers, panting and glistening with sweat, put down their burdens in front of my tent. They untied the tusks from the pole, washed and dried the blood and mud off them, then leant them up against a tree in front of my tent.

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A late supper was quickly laid. Guinea-fowl soup. Stewed guinea-fowl and rice. Cold guinea-fowl liver.

The guinea-fowl had been shot with a pea-rifle by the cook. The cook shoots guinea-fowl every day—guinea-fowl shooting being his favourite occupation, he having a better liking for shooting them than for cooking them. He is better at shooting, too. His eternal guinea-fowl diet is fit to make you heave.

At last there is the mosquito net and the music of the crickets and grasshoppers and mosquitoes and owls and nocturnal monkeys, and one last sleepy appreciative look at the tusks leant up against their tree—and I forgive all my fellow-beings from the bottom of my heart, and am content with the day and the world.

The dying camp-fire flickers up again and again. And as often as it flickers my heart thumps, for out of the darkness gleams the souvenir of this unforgettable day, the finest reward an African hunter can have—a pair of 100-lb. tusks.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### AN END

THE ship is taking me home. I am lying in a sheltered corner of the deck sorting out my photographs and my memories.

The sea heaves with dark-green, gentle hills of water, flecked here and there with white foam. The waves break hissing against the ship's moving prow, to part gently, and gently sway my deck-chair.

And above me and round me the gulls are screaming and whirling. Wandering, shrill-voiced, milk-white sea birds. Since morning they have been following the ship indefatigably, soaring now high and now low on the wings of the breeze, their own wings scarcely moving and yet keeping up so easily with the boat.

They only fall behind when somebody throws out scraps of food from the galley port-hole down below. Then they fall screaming into the foaming, whirling wake behind us, snatch at the scraps, sit for a moment rocking on the waves, and then they are back again, wailing round the ship once more.

They joined us this morning when we sailed. They are free to turn back, but still they come with us.

Over in the West, where the sun is soon going to sink into the sea, where the line of smoke that

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streams from the funnel points with a black ironical finger, beyond the horizon, is Africa. I could see its shores still at noon, but now they have sunk into the distance.

So I say good-bye to it for the fourth time. This time too I say it as I did before, as someone who will come back.

And I must come back sooner or later, for I have left half my heart there. Left it trapped behind the sinking sun in the depths of the forests—in the land of elephants.









